THE Atlantic MONTHLY
SEPTEMBER 2002

PART TWO OF
WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE'S
AMERICAN GROUND:
Unbuilding the World Trade Center

THE RUSH TO RECOVER

PLUS:

HOMELAND INSECURITY

A TOP EXPERT SAYS AMERICA'S APPROACH TO PROTECTING ITSELF WILL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE

BY CHARLES C. MANN

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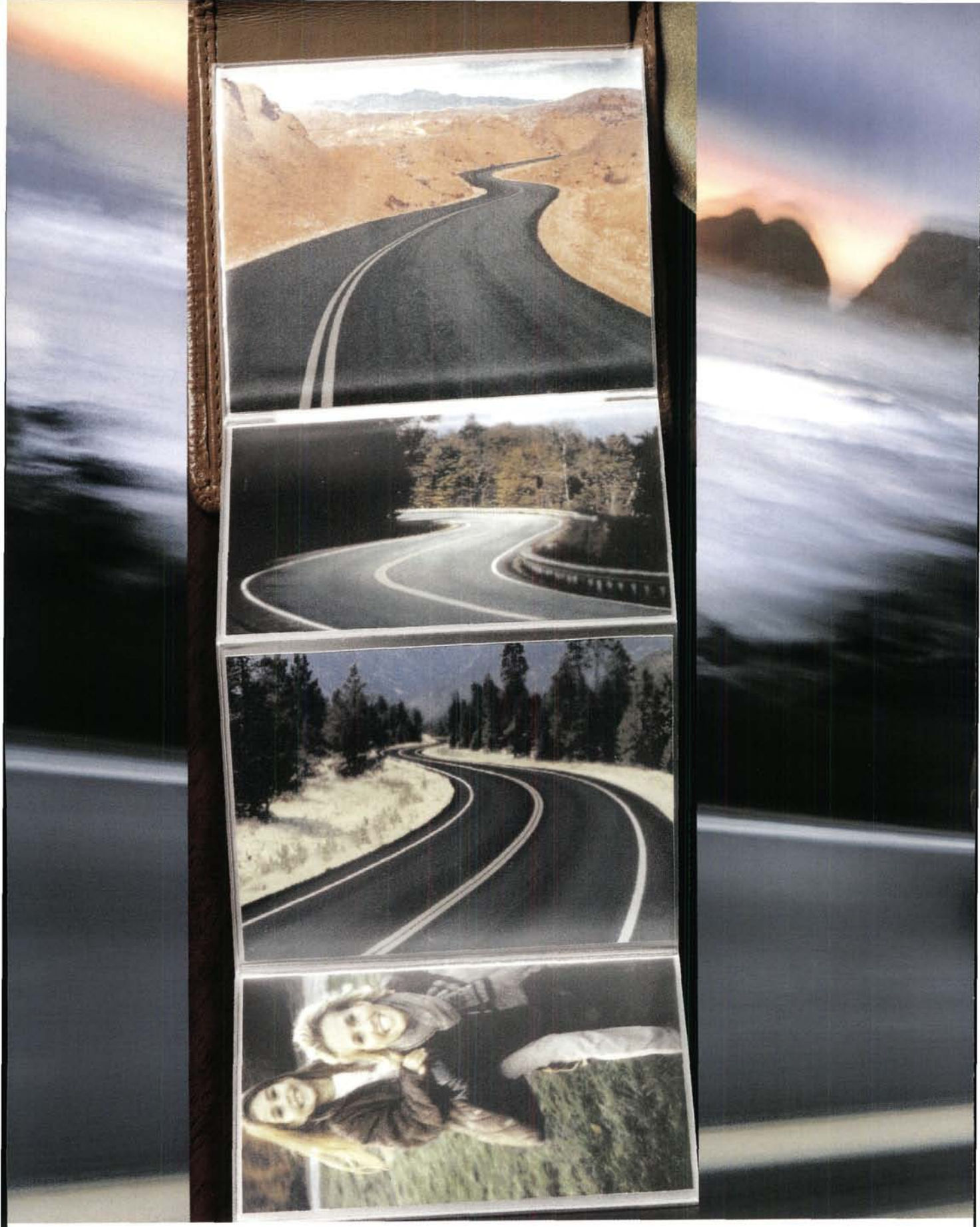

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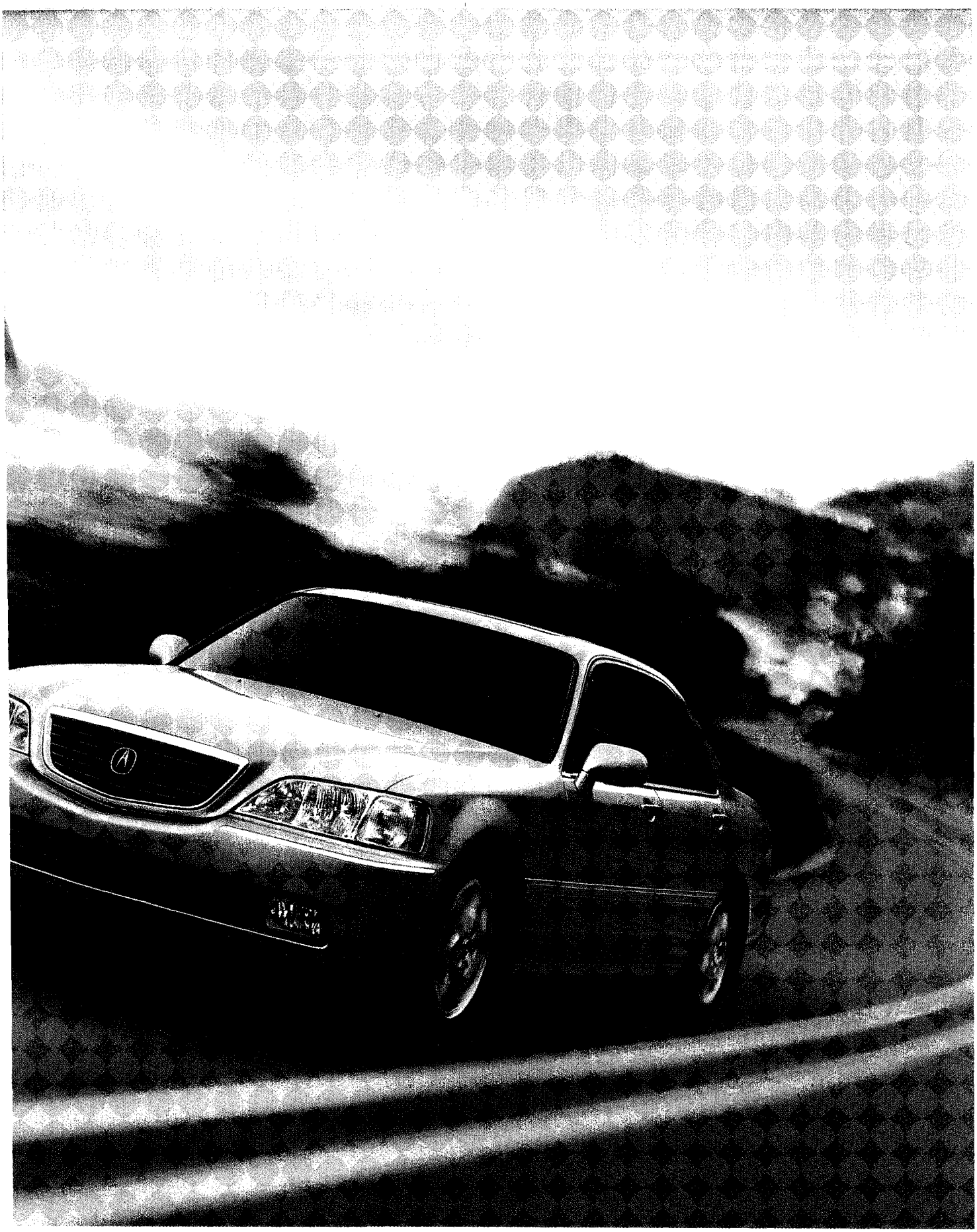

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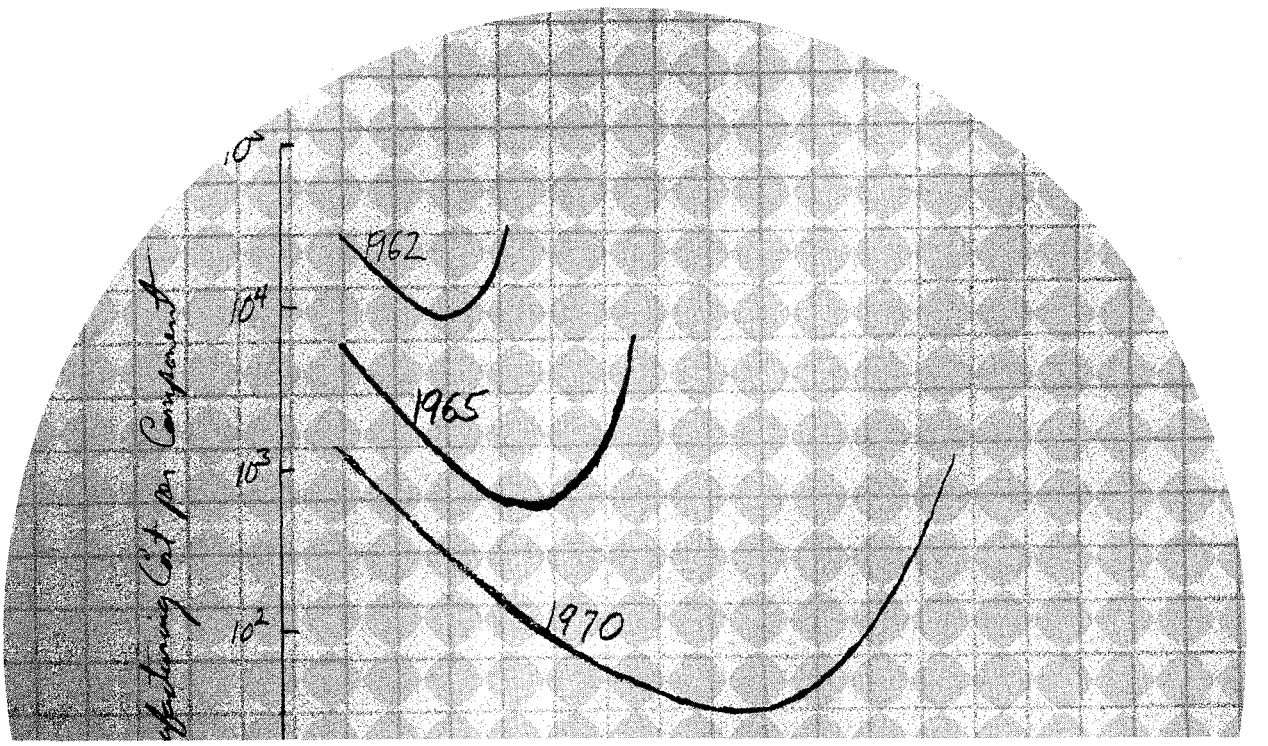

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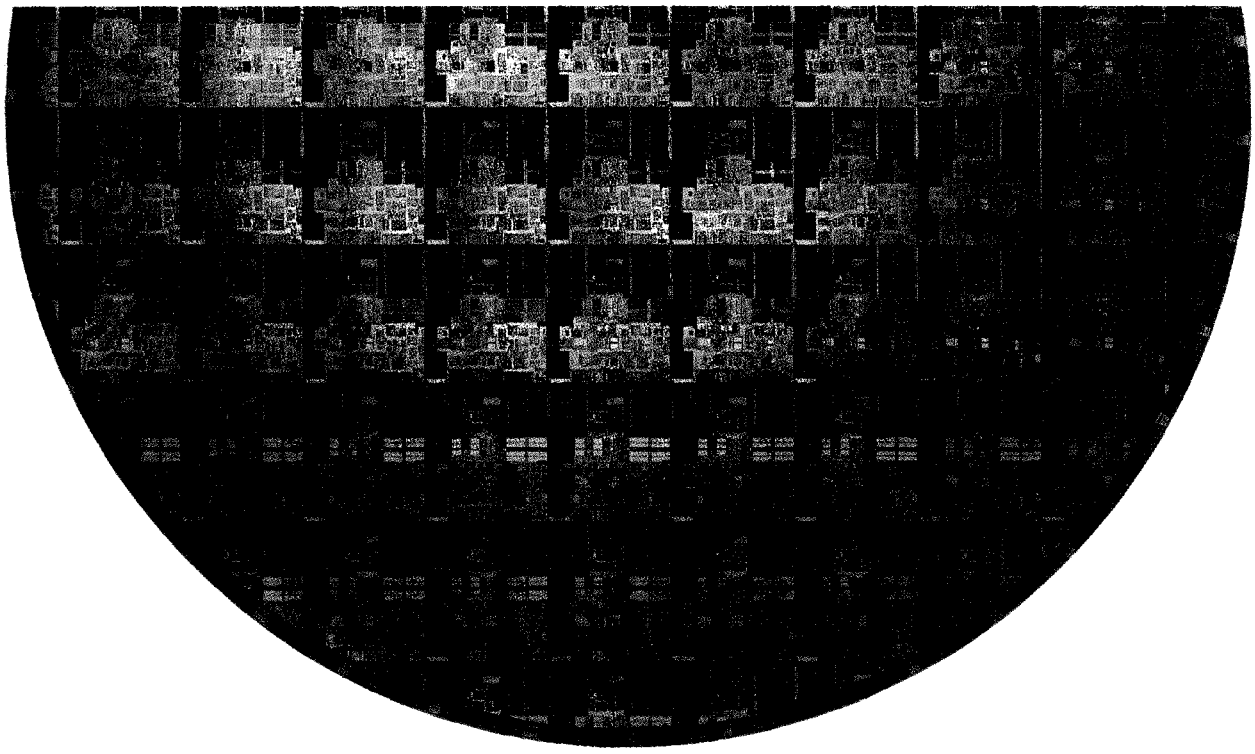

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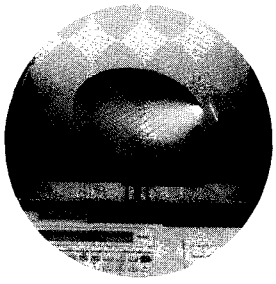

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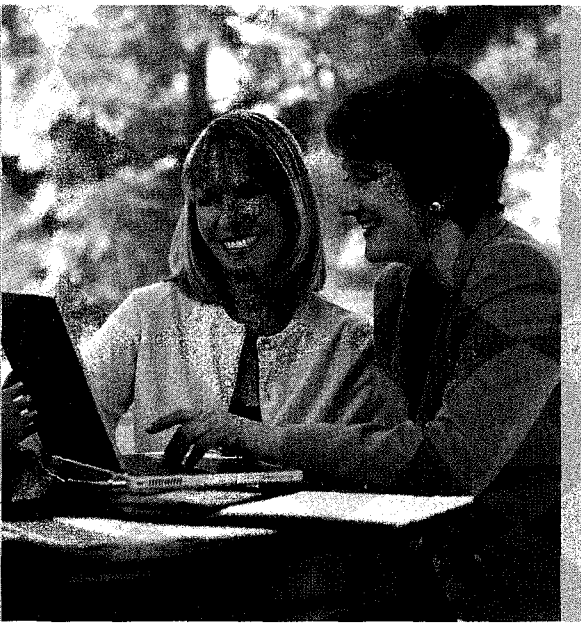

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THE Atlantic

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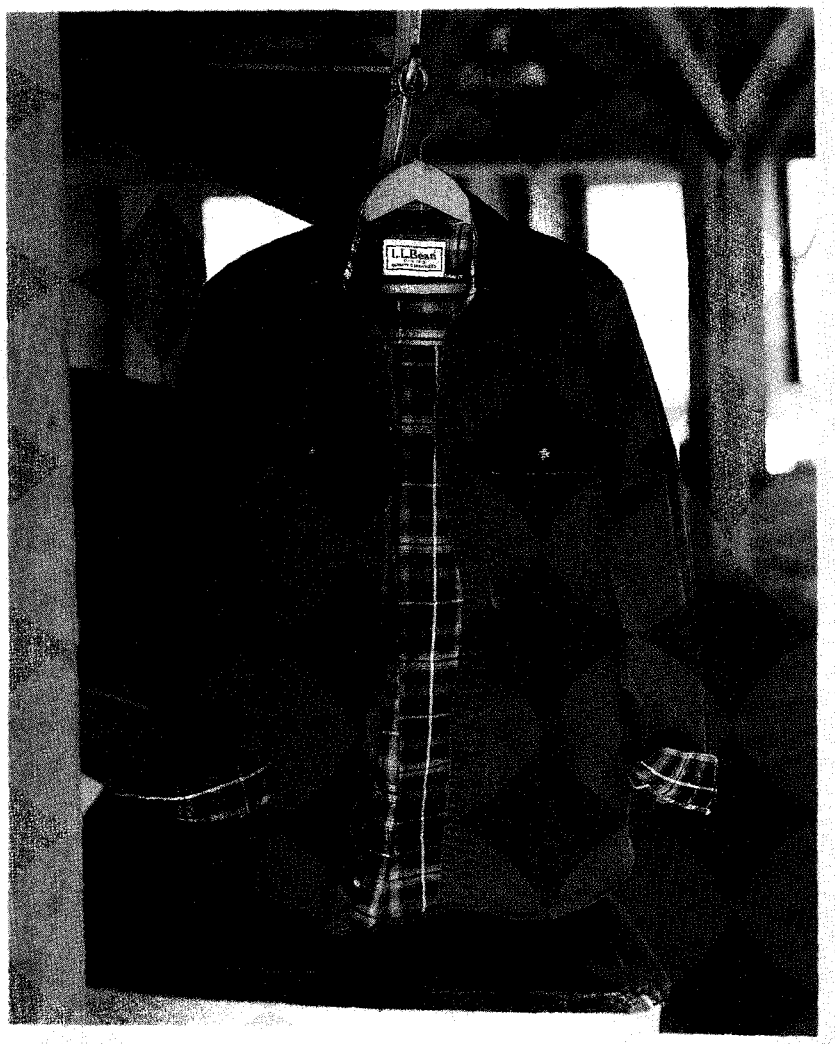

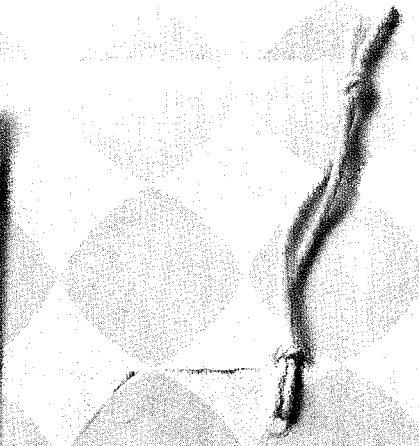

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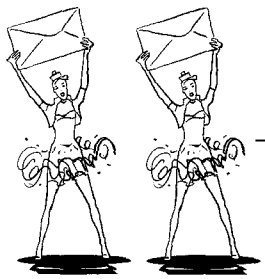

Letters to the Editor

The Joint Strike Fighter

As a Lockheed Martin employee, I read with interest James Fallows's article "Uncle Sam Buys an Airplane" (June *Atlantic*). However, as an ex-Marine Harrier pilot, I must correct his statements concerning the JSF's "tour de force called Mission X," in which he claims that the JSF is the first airplane to make a short takeoff, go supersonic, and then land vertically.

In late 1970, as an exchange pilot, I joined the British Royal Air Force's No. 233 Operational Conversion Unit, first as a student and then as an instructor, training pilots in the Harrier. Although the Harrier was classed as a subsonic airplane, because its normal operating mode did not call for supersonic operations, it was capable of supersonic flight. One training flight called for a short takeoff, a supersonic run out beyond the Midlands coast, and a return to the field for vertical takeoff and landing practice. So the "tour de force called Mission X" was routinely being flown more than thirty years ago.

Jon R. Gibson
Robstown, Texas

James Fallows portrays the Washington bureaucrat Darleen Druyun as a clever, almost heroic defender of the taxpayers' money. I think the reverse is true. During the middle 1990s Druyun was the driving force behind "acquisition reform" and TSPR ("total system performance responsibility"). These were innovations in which contractors essentially had carte blanche to run programs as they pleased. The Air Force program offices watched from the sidelines, together with the nonprofit systems-engineering organizations that supported them (Aerospace Corporation, MITRE).

The first guinea pig (later the poster child) for this approach was the Space Based Infrared System program, a missile warning and surveillance system. Today that program is $2 billion over budget and two years behind schedule. Air Force Undersecretary Peter Teets told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 20 that poor contracting methods were responsible for this disaster and that TSPR caused the taxpayers to assume too much risk.

Len Winner
Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.

One thing that was missing from James Fallows's otherwise excellent piece on the Joint Strike Fighter was any historical perspective on the size of the defense budget. The sharp drop in defense spending since the end of the Cold War has made the Pentagon's current replacement cycle that much more difficult. Outlays for "procurement" (equipment and material) for the ten years ending with fiscal year 2002 dropped by 42 percent in constant dollars compared with the prior ten years: $580 billion versus $1 trillion. Although plans call for the procurement budget to increase over the next five years, at the end of that time it will still be less than three quarters of what it was in the 1980s.

Fallows also points to the steady decline in the numbers of aircraft bought since World War II and the steady rise in the price per plane. Certainly, as he notes, some of this price increase reflects the well-known tendency of the bureaucracy to gold-plate specifications. But most of the higher cost reflects the strategy of making the planes more competitive (that is, more lethal and safer to operate): the replacement of simple piston engines with costlier but more capable jet engines, the greater sophistication of the avionics systems, and so forth. Similar trends can be seen in the civilian economy. Since the 1940s houses, farm tractors, and even private planes have grown in size, features, and functionality as incomes have grown.

Yet a third factor behind the more limited production has been the decline in defense spending relative to the economy over this period. Defense accounted for 36 percent of GDP in 1944, when all those P-51s were being built. It was 11 percent during the Korean War, when the F-86 was on the front line; eight percent in the early 1960s, when the F-4 was first deployed; five or six percent in the 1980s, when the F-16 entered production; and is currently three percent. In the post–Cold War era, "How much is enough?" is a critical question for defense spending and for programs like the JSF. If our military strategy is to include manned fighter aircraft, their affordability should be debated with an eye to the total cost to the economy.

Robert Kugel
Burlingame, Calif.

James Fallows replies:

Jon Gibson is correct in saying that Harrier pilots have for years combined short takeoff, supersonic cruise, and vertical landing in the same flight. What made Mission X unusual is that it combined the short takeoff and landing with supersonic cruise in level flight. *Every airplane goes faster when descending, and the Harriers had achieved supersonic speed while diving toward the ground.*

As for Len Winner's complaint, I tried to stress in the article that many things could still go wrong with the JSF. But if Darleen Druyun and her colleagues are judged by results, particularly in cost control, so far they've done surprisingly well.

I agree with Robert Kugel that there are larger questions to ask about the defense budget.

Case Against Europe

Walter Russell Mead pooh-poohs the notion that Americans are "too stupid to make good decisions" ("The Case Against Europe," April *Atlantic*).

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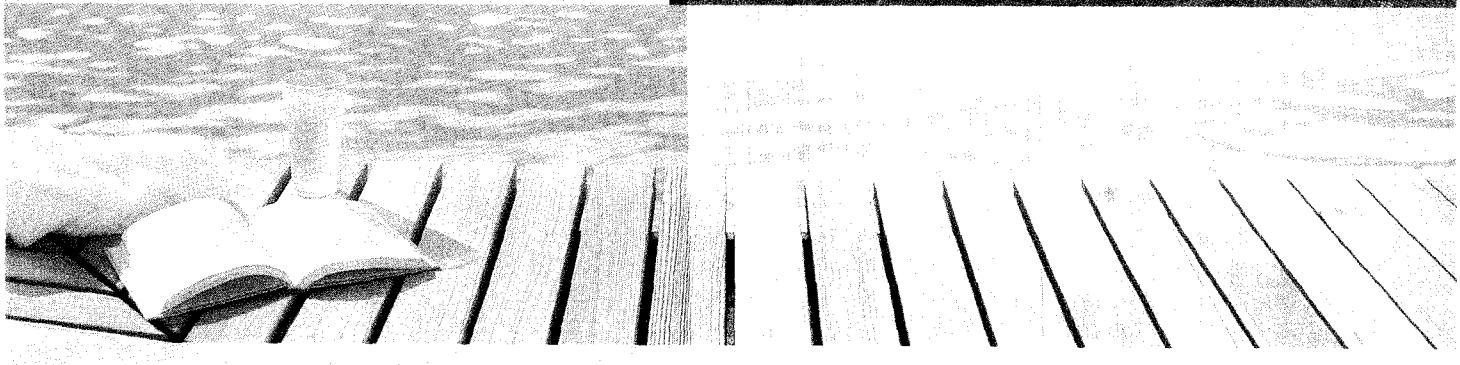

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Allow me to provide a few real-life facts that Mead omitted: Western European workers enjoy six-week to three-month vacations, whereas Americans are lucky if they get two weeks. Americans are working longer hours than they have since the Depression, while the French are being lauded for the success of their thirty-five-hour work week. Europeans have national pension plans generous enough to allow retired citizens to maintain dignity and independence. We've got puny Social Security, slated by both Republicans and Democrats for slow destruction. Of the world's industrial nations only America lacks a national health plan. Our private health plans are justifiably ridiculed. According to the UN, the World Health Organization, and other universally accepted sources, seventeen nations have a higher standard of living. We're twenty-fourth in overall health. More than 50 percent of our population is obese. In the States it's "normal" for a college student to graduate heavily in debt—an idea rightfully abhorrent in Western European nations, where higher education is free. Believe me, I could go on, covering areas such as food quality (in Europe genetically altered foods are discouraged and clearly identified on packaging; not so in America), the growing prevalence in the United States of polluting SUVs (as our air quality drops and our asthma rates reach epidemic levels), and so on.

Does Mead actually believe that the quality of life in the United States is superior to that in France? When is the last time he visited France—1945? Beep beep, indeed.

Ken Weiss
New Rochelle, N.Y.

Whoa. Walter Russell Mead sounds as if he just got back from a European vacation on which a teenaged waiter publicly embarrassed him for not knowing the difference between a Bordeaux and a Burgundy.

I would say that Americans have learned little if anything about nationalism but have only benefited from the isolation provided by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. European social policy and labor movements are a true reflection of democratic states, providing the most good for the most people, whereas Americans support government policy that provides for the wealthy few and abandons those most in need. Having lived through every prejudice and injustice of Christianity, Europeans are aghast at the hypocrisy of American religion.

I am not surprised that Americans don't choose the difficult path to enlightenment that comes with the study of European culture and, especially, history, as they purchase their university education. More fun to take TV studies, so that they can be as well versed as Mead on the lessons of life provided by that great sage, Andy of Mayberry.

Most European countries have had a turn as the bully, at one time or another, in the playground of the world, so they know that what goes around comes around. I would venture that many Europeans watching Americans prepare to expand their crusade against the whole Muslim world are saying, "Haven't they learned anything?"

Martin Gagné
Toronto, Ontario

Walter Russell Mead replies:

Ken Weiss and Martin Gagné should stop shooting the messenger. My article tried to describe the populist American case against Europe, not to summarize my personal views.

The greatest danger to good transatlantic relations, however, is not the rise of populist anti-Europeanism in America. It is the European tendency to blame the United States for the continuing decline in Europe's world power. With a shrinking population, a relative decline in its military capacities, and an economic model that, however dolce *the* vita *it produces today, undermines the region's potential for long-term growth, Europe is bound to see its influence in the world and on the United States continue to diminish. Faced with this prospect, it has two realistic alternatives. It can seek to reverse the decline—primarily by shifting to the kind of cutthroat capitalism that would get its growth rate up and also by ramping up its defense expenditures to near U.S. levels. Or it can gracefully accept a diminishing role in world politics and take six-week vacations while sipping delicious wines on the banks of the Seine. Speaking personally, I wish it well either way.*

Unfortunately, so far Europe seems to be opting for a third choice: aspiring to be a major player in world politics, refusing to make the difficult policy decisions that would make this course viable, and then blaming the United States for its lack of world power.

Richard Posner

Richard A. Posner's criticism of academics who exceed the limits of their expertise with "off-the-cuff commentary on matters about which they know nothing more than the average newspaper reader" (Letters, May *Atlantic*) could not be better illustrated than by the letter that followed it (commenting on Bernard Lewis's "What Went Wrong With Muslim Civilization," in the January *Atlantic*).

According to the Harvard astrophysicist David Layzer, Christendom in the Middle Ages was less free, prosperous, civilized, and tolerant than its Muslim counterpart. In those same Middle Ages armies of men carried wicker baskets of mortar to build Romanesque cathedrals that have stood for a millennium. The eleventh-century Domesday Book records nearly 6,000 water mills operating in Britain, representing a technological revolution unmatched for eight centuries. The unparalleled intellect of Saint Thomas Aquinas was mining the riches of pagan, Jewish, and Muslim philosophy (the last courtesy of Latin translations of Arabic works that began to appear in Europe in the eleventh century, not the sixteenth). "Newton's" First Law of Motion was articulated and disseminated throughout the Western world, courtesy of Jean Buridan, of the Sorbonne, in 1330. And women of the thirteenth century reached a zenith of status within their respective "estates" (in terms of scholarship, ownership of property and business, participation in the trades, ecclesiastical power and influence, and even a vote on the odd rural town council) that would be slowly eroded and finally buried during those humanist centuries so dear to Professor Layzer.

The Monty Python–esque vision of the magnificent Middle Ages is a comfortable couch for the scientist's sense of self-importance, but it has nothing to do with reality. Score one for Judge Posner.

Claudia Sommers Brown
Toronto, Ontario

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In his analysis of the ways in which universities make themselves attractive to students, Richard Posner surprisingly omits grade inflation ("The University as Business," June *Atlantic*). As long as students are regarded as customers first and foremost, they will get what they want. And what they want most of all is *A*s. Giving low grades might drive tuition-paying customers off campus. That's a risk that few schools are willing to run today. By allowing grade inflation to continue, however, institutions are placing survival ahead of excellence. The trouble with this policy is that in the long run grade inflation causes degree deflation. When that happens, everyone loses.

Walt Gardner
Los Angeles, Calif.

Cloning

Kyla Dunn ("Cloning Trevor") and Robert A. Weinberg ("Of Clones and Clowns") chastise many scientists and others involved in the cloning debate for exaggerating their claims and causing harm by misleading the public and probably legislators as well. They are right in their evaluation, and it is only unfortunate that whoever designed the cover of the June *Atlantic Monthly* did not heed their warning. "Cloning Trevor" in inch-high red letters is really misleading and could cause harm, especially when nobody talked about cloning Trevor, nobody is cloning Trevor, and nobody is planning to clone Trevor.

Davor Solter
Department of Developmental Biology
Max Planck Institute of Immunobiology
Freiburg, Germany

Kyla Dunn replies:

Actually, "cloning Trevor" is exactly what Advanced Cell Technology was attempting. So although I agree with Davor Solter that the cover of the June issue was designed to catch a reader's eye, I do not agree that it is harmful or misleading. That same cover text states (albeit in smaller, green letters) that the story is about two parents exploring "radical new therapies that might save their son's life." It sets readers up for a discussion of the difference between "reproductive cloning," whose goal is to produce a baby, and "therapeutic cloning," whose goal is to produce stem cells and advance medical research (ACT's goal for patients like Trevor).

Both forms of cloning start out with a laboratory procedure known as somatic-cell nuclear transfer, whose product is a cloned human embryo in a petri dish. All that is left is to decide what to do with that microscopic ball of cells: attempt to derive stem cells from it, or attempt to implant it in a woman's uterus, where it might grow into a baby. Once the embryo exists, "cloning" has already taken place.

Solter, however, does raise a concern common among scientists—many of whom argue that the term "cloning" should be reserved exclusively for attempts to produce a living, breathing genetic copy of an existing individual. They want to abandon the term "therapeutic cloning" altogether. It's a campaign made all the more urgent by the fact that irresponsible would-be reproductive cloners like Panos Zavos have hijacked the term "therapeutic cloning," arguing that their work is a "therapeutic" treatment for infertility.

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It's pretty clear why mainstream researchers are concerned. Last February, in fact, three prominent scientists—including the president of the National Academy of Sciences—published an article in the journal Science *titled "Please Don't Call It Cloning!" in which they suggested an alternative moniker for therapeutic cloning: "nuclear transplantation." Some politicians have started to use this term as well.*

I hardly need point out how poorly chosen this language is. While trying to avoid the inflammatory word "cloning," these advocates of medical research have opted for an equally inflammatory and misunderstood word—"nuclear"—and have crafted a phrase that conjures unfortunate (if irrelevant) images of nuclear weapons and nuclear waste.

What's more, removing the term "cloning" from the discussion might backfire—because it may not be clear to the public that cloning technology has important medical applications. Who, then, among laypeople will be likely to object to a bill like the Human Cloning Prohibition Act (co-sponsored by Senators Sam Brownback, of Kansas, and Mary Landrieu, of Louisiana), which would do unprecedented damage to medical research by banning all forms of human cloning—including therapeutic cloning (... But medical research has nothing to do with "cloning," right? It's "nuclear transplantation" we need to protect ...).

And if the public doesn't understand the precise relationship between cloning and stem-cell research, who will know enough to object to Senator Landrieu's misleading assertion "This is not an anti-stem-cell-research bill. It's an anti-human-cloning bill ... [and] does not have anything to do with stem-cell research."

Some scientists and bioethicists have gone even further in their attempts to reshape the language of this debate. To avoid the knee-jerk reactions inevitably evoked by the word "embryo," they have suggested such alternatives as "activated egg" and "ovasome." And they argue that embryos created through cloning are not truly "embryos," since they do not result from the traditional fusion of sperm and egg. Leon Kass, an ardent foe of therapeutic cloning and the head of President Bush's new Council on Bioethics, is among those who are impatient with these efforts. "Let's call things by their true names," Kass told The Washington Post. *"If you're going to sin, let's sin bravely." The word "embryo," he says, works just fine.*

This may be the one point on which Dr. Kass and I agree. The word "embryo" does work just fine. So does the word "cloning." Why? Because nothing about the procedure of therapeutic cloning is a "sin"—not the creation of cloned human embryos for research, and not their destruction to advance medical therapies. So let's call this procedure by its right name, and stand by it bravely.

Robert A. Weinberg's piece incorrectly states that the Sierra Club signed on to a letter opposing therapeutic cloning. Although a few individuals who signed the letter in question used their affiliation with the Sierra Club for identification purposes, they were speaking for themselves only. Our organization has not yet examined the question of human genetic engineering, and it has no policy or position on therapeutic cloning.

Carl Pope
Executive Director
Sierra Club
San Francisco, Calif.

Robert Weinberg's essay incorrectly states the position of Friends of the Earth on the topic of cloning. We support research that would help determine the therapeutic potential of human stem cells. We also call for a moratorium—not a ban—on embryo-cloning research until strict government regulation is established to prevent abuses of this technology.

Mark Helm
Friends of the Earth
Washington, D.C.

Robert A. Weinberg replies:
I was misled by a newspaper article attributing endorsement of an anti-cloning letter to the Sierra Club and the Friends of the Earth, and I apologize to Carl Pope and Mark Helm and their organizations, whose names were inappropriately associated by my article with this letter.

Tales of the Tyrant

Mark Bowden's "Tales of the Tyrant" (May *Atlantic*) details Saddam Hussein's relationships with civilian and military leaders in Iraq and the struggle between the "city" and "tribe" mentalities that so accurately describes the dilemma of many Iraqis.

However, Bowden cites the fate of my grandfather, the former Prime Minister Tahir Yahya, as an example of Saddam's enduring cruelty. The article states that my grandfather "was assigned to push a wheelbarrow from cell to cell, collecting the prisoners' slop buckets ... until the day Yahya died, in prison." I cannot corroborate or deny the first half of this story, because my grandfather would not discuss his time in prison with his children. However, I do know that my grandfather was released from imprisonment in November of 1970, and that he lived under house arrest until he passed away, in April of 1986, at home with his family at his side.

Aous Araim
Duluth, Ga.

Mark Bowden replies:
I am very pleased to learn that Mr. Yahya's end was not as bleak as I described, and I apologize for the error.

Innocent Bystander

Cullen Murphy ("The Great In-Between," June *Atlantic*) provides an amusing tour of limbo, both the metaphysical and the here-and-now variety, but he gets the inhabitants of Dante's limbo in Canto 4 of the *Inferno* a bit confused. He correctly identifies the three Muslim souls Dante sees (Avicenna, Averroës, and Saladin), and he mentions some worthy pagans down there (Socrates, Plato, and Aeneas), but his inclusion of Brutus, without specifying which one, is misleading. Most readers would think this is the Brutus (Marcus Junius) who led the conspiracy against Julius Caesar, whereas the Brutus in Dante's limbo is Lucius Junius, who lived half a millennium earlier and overthrew the last Roman king, Tarquin the Proud. Dante does see Caesar's assassin in the poem, but this later Brutus, who is one of the three worst sinners in hell, is being chomped on in one of Lucifer's three mouths. (Cassius and Judas Iscariot are in the other two.)

Murphy also mentions "luminaries from the Hebrew Bible" as populating Dante's limbo, but these figures—Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and others—are mentioned as having been

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liberated from limbo when Jesus Christ harrowed hell after the Crucifixion. By the fictional date of Dante's poem (spring of 1300) they had already been relaxing in *paradiso* for almost thirteen centuries.

Peter D'Epiro
Ridgewood, N.J.

Cullen Murphy refers in the June *Atlantic* to the Canadian poet Irving Clayton. I think he meant to say Irving Layton.

Edward Collister
Québec City, Québec

Common Ancestors

After reading "The Royal We," by Steve Olson (May *Atlantic*), I was ready to let my cousin Queen Elizabeth know what I thought about the British branch of our family. Before doing that, however, I thought it would be prudent to consult the article on which "The Royal We" is based—namely, Joseph T. Chang's "Recent Common Ancestors of All Present-Day Individuals."

Unfortunately, Chang makes it clear in his article that his model does *not* apply to the real-world situation posited by Steve Olson. Specifically, the Chang model assumes not only that mating is random (no geographic barriers) but, even more important, that population size is constant. His model would be closer to reality if the current population of the world were about five million (or whatever the best estimate is for the world population in 1400). This is why Chang states in his discussion that "it is doubtful that anyone would seriously entertain the two-parent answer" he proposes "in the context of the evolution of mankind." That seems to be what Steve Olson is seriously entertaining in "The Royal We"—wrongly.

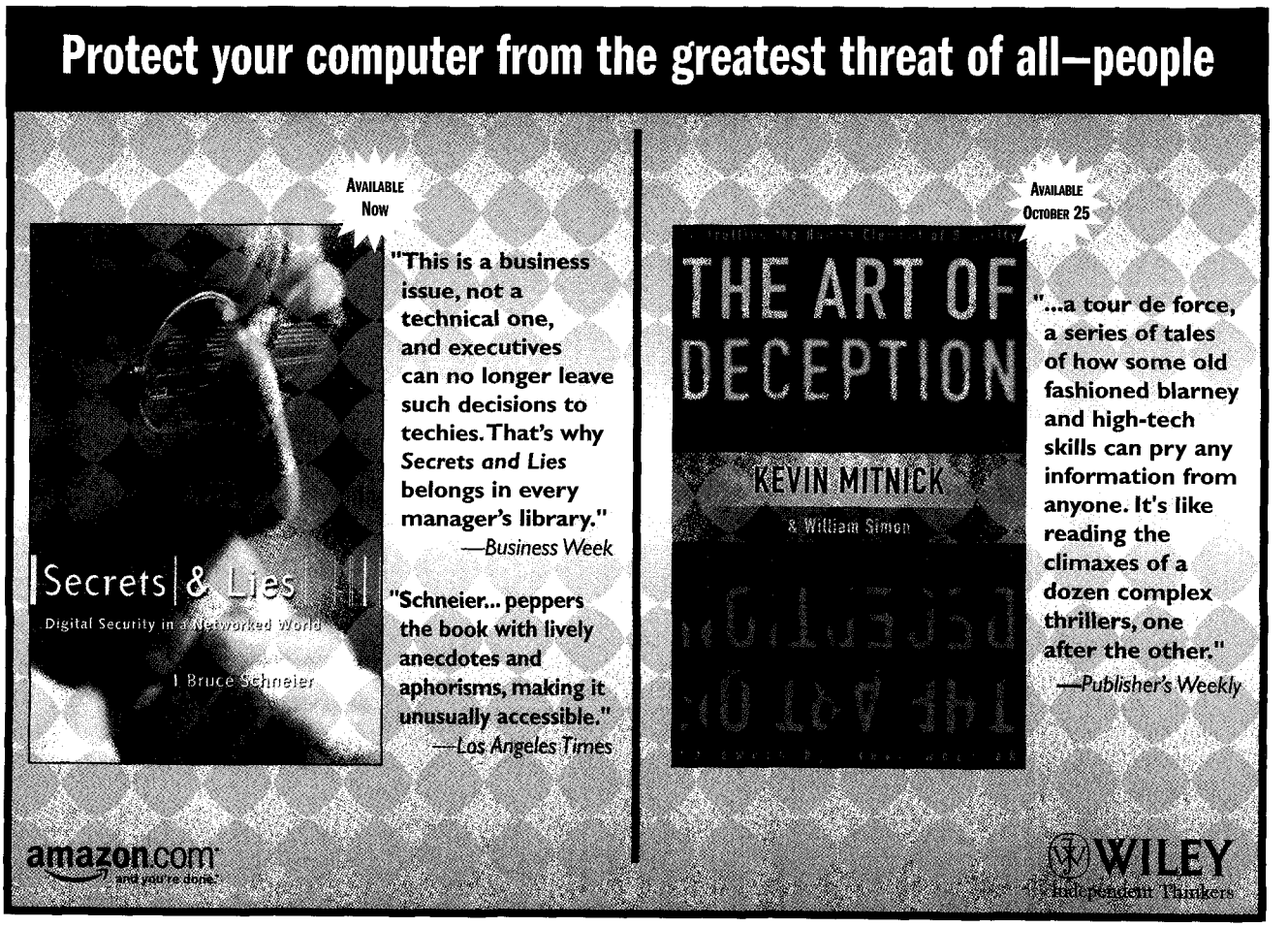
I am sorry to point this out, because it cuts down my roster of illustrious ancestors. I am only consoled that the world's worst criminals are also unlikely to be my relatives.

Gustav Magrinat
Greensboro, N.C.

Steve Olson replies:

I'm glad Gustav Magrinat wrote his letter, because it gives me a chance to elaborate on the incredible recentness of our common ancestors. Population growth is not a major factor, as Joseph Chang explained to me when I was writing the article. The time to the most recent common ancestor for a constant population of 50 million is about the same as for a population that grew from 50 million to 500 million (as Europe's did from 1400 to today). The more serious issue is non-random mating. Human beings tend to divide themselves into groups—classes, races, ethnicities, castes—and to marry and have children with other members of their own group. But no group is an island. Even groups that would seem to be completely isolated—such as doctrinaire religious sects, or the occupants of the New and Old Worlds before Columbus—have been known to exchange mates with their neighbors (across the Bering Strait in the latter case).

Thus the world more closely resembles clusters of randomly mating populations linked by occasional migrants. Mathematically, this is equivalent to a small-worlds



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network. Research in the past few years has shown that the shortest path from any individual in such a network to any other individual is not much longer than in a totally random network. Translated into genealogical terms, the most recent common ancestor in such a world would have lived just a little earlier than such an ancestor in a world of random mating.

This result seems less amazing if you think about the huge number of ancestors we have. If we count back ten generations, each of us has 1,024 ancestors (this figure ignores inbreeding). Go back twenty generations, or about five hundred years, and each of us has more than one million. Mr. Magrinat is indeed descended from many thieves, murderers, and scoundrels—but so am I. So is everyone.

Who Says?

In his replies (June *Atlantic*) to letters about his article on adolescent murders ("The Apocalypse of Adolescence," March *Atlantic*) Ron Powers erroneously attributes the quotation about "lies, damn lies, and statistics" to Mark Twain. This is a common error. Although it's something Twain might have written, it was in fact Benjamin Disraeli who said it.

Charles-Gene McDaniel
Chicago, Ill.

Ron Powers replies:

Charles-Gene McDaniel is sharp-eyed and partly right: Mark Twain himself attributed the quotation to Disraeli, but it doesn't appear in Disraeli's writings, only in Twain's autobiography.

Advice & Consent

Walter Kirn makes excellent points against a national identification card ("The Mother of Reinvention," May *Atlantic*) and rightly concludes that identity schemes are inherently dangerous slippery slopes that threaten liberty. However, he errs when he implies that U.S. citizens currently have a legal duty to have and show an ID to fly on a "federally regulated aircraft." No federal law or regulation imposes any such duty. As the FAA's Web site advises in its question-and-answer section (see cas.faa.gov/faq.html), "The FAA does not prohibit the airline from transporting any passenger who does not present a photo ID. Airlines have available to them alternate procedures that allow them to transport passengers without ID. However, some airlines choose not to use such procedures, which is their prerogative."

And "The FAA does not require all passengers to present ID. The FAA requires that airlines apply additional security measures to passengers who are unable to produce ID upon request."

A legal duty to have an ID for domestic interstate travel would be unconstitutional, but the mere existence of photo IDs led to socially acceptable mission creep such as de facto demands for their use at airports. This creates a market for false IDs, and a market for borrowed or stolen Social Security numbers, which are required to obtain most IDs, thus lowering the value of all IDs and Social Security numbers. The real tragedy, however, is that after the terrorist attacks last September airlines and the government continue the ruse that possession of an ID has any security value at all.

Mike Stollenwerk
Marina del Rey, Calif.

Though I was a friend and colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King during the last year of his life, I agreed to become James Earl Ray's attorney after becoming convinced of Ray's innocence. I spent the first ten years of a twenty-five-year investigation of the assassination in arriving at this determination. Consequently, over a twenty-year period I probably came to know James better than anyone except perhaps his brother Jerry.

With this background, I am compelled to take exception to some of Douglas Brinkley and Anne Brinkley's characterizations of James and also certain of their interpretations of events that are outside the contents of the letters ("Lawyers and Lizard-Heads," May *Atlantic*). These accounts are flawed because they are based on a secondary source, and an unreliable one at that.

For example, Brinkley states, "Ray was, of course, a racist." Well, he was not. Ralph Abernathy and I confirmed this impression after I vigorously interrogated James in an initial five-hour meeting. It was subsequently strengthened after I spent hundreds of hours with him. My view aside, Ralph Abernathy knew something about racists, and he agreed. James picked no fights with blacks, anywhere, but in fact shot dice with black fellow workers after work in a shoe factory. He refused to go to the prison farm not because blacks were there but because marijuana was widely used there and he was afraid that he could be "set up" and lose his privileges. Also, contrary to the Brinkleys' assertion, he never attempted to go to Rhodesia but, rather, sought a way into Angola, a former Portuguese colony—hence his trip to Portugal, which would have been a useless point of departure for British Rhodesia.

The Brinkleys' source for portraying James as a racist is Gerald Posner, whose book is described as "the most respected ... on the assassination." I advised the Brinkleys that Posner had not interviewed 90 percent of the witnesses who testified at the trial (whose identities he may not even have been aware of); neither did he attend one minute of the proceedings.

The Brinkleys express astonishment at the support for James by the civil-rights community. I suggest that this support could result from concerned individuals' having informed themselves about the facts and the evidence.

William F. Pepper
Wolfson College
Oxford University
Oxford, England

Editors' Note:

In Part One of "American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center" (July/August 2002), William Langewiesche noted that the words "Kill All Muslims" were scrawled on a wall in the Bankers Trust building and were followed by the initials B.F.D. He wondered in passing whether "maybe someone" from the Boston Fire Department had written the words. Langewiesche's comment was presented as the momentary speculation of someone reporting his first thoughts at the scene. He realized that "B.F.D." may well have indicated a fire department in some city other than Boston, and that lack of information obviously makes any determination impossible. We assumed that readers would realize this too.

For the record, the Boston Fire Department rejects any inference of involvement.

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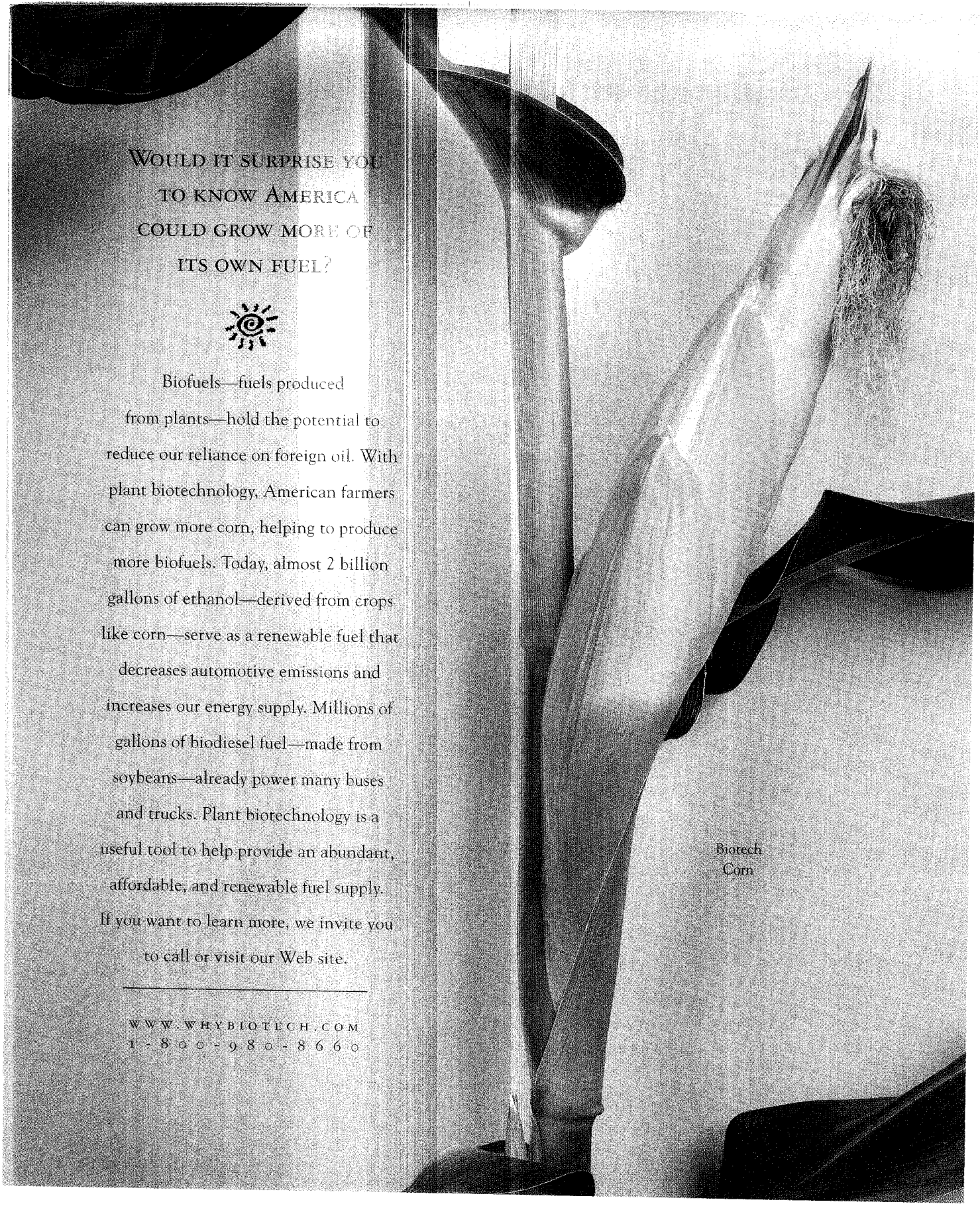

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INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by CULLEN MURPHY

CIRCUIT BREAKERS

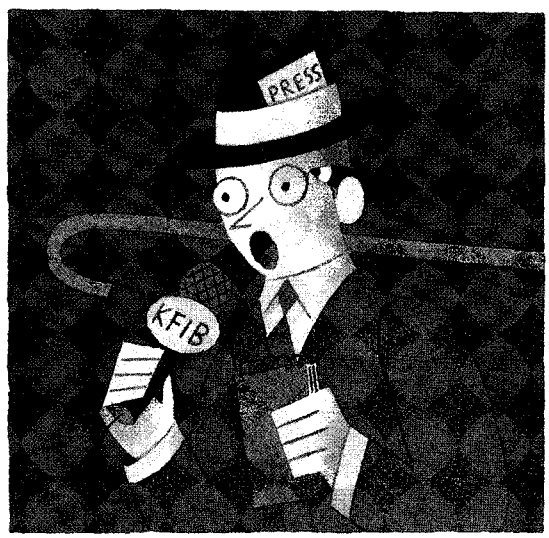
How the example of Wall Street and the Fed could help save the press from itself

.....

In his book *The Price of Glory* the historian Alistair Horne presents a sobering narrative of the ten-month Battle of Verdun, during World War I. In February of 1916 the fortress of Douaumont stood intact, a massive polygonal bastion, its concrete and earthen shell imposingly thick. By December, after unremitting bombardment, the shape of the fortress could scarcely be discerned. For miles around, the terrain had been churned into a porridge. Some 80,000 shells exploded in a single piece of ground, 500 yards by 1,000 yards. Then there was the rain. "The battlefield swiftly became a morass of mud, in which reinforcements stumbling lost at night were sucked down and drowned as in a quicksand."

I find myself thinking about that landscape whenever the American press gets drawn into one of its periodic bouts of pointless saturation coverage. The anthrax problem last fall was real, and had tragic consequences; it demanded good reporting. But the coverage quickly took on a lurid and hysterical cast, and became all but inescapable. A year ago, all summer long, the news was consumed by the story of Congressman Gary Condit and the missing intern Chandra Levy. This past spring it was consumed by the story of Andrea Yates, who had drowned her five small children, and was standing trial in Texas. (Her husband, Rusty, spent part of the day of the sentencing as a commentator on television programs with Larry King and Katie Couric.) The timeline of our recent national life is regularly punctuated by episodes of this kind: Elian Gonzalez. Viagra. Monica Lewinsky. Y2K. O.J. Princess Diana. JonBenet Ramsey. Heidi Fleiss. Tonya Harding. The Michael Skakel trial is over, but just ahead lies the legal trifecta of Zacarias Moussaoui, Robert Blake, and the thwarted shoe bomber Richard C. Reid.

The trajectory is familiar: A story breaks. It works its way down (or up) the journalistic food chain, touching every link: the cable news programs, the talk shows, the exploitation shows, the tabloids, the Web sites, the comedians. The story settles in, like a weather inversion. Even sensible people inside the news business seem powerless to escape, caught up like everyone else by the demand for revelations and interviews, for scoops and "gets." Then, after a time, the story begins to fade, and a period of recrimination and self-loathing sets in. Remember the scene where the werewolf wakes up, normal again, and slowly realizes that it has been another bad night?



One analogue of the situation that news outlets find themselves in is the stock market crash of October 19, 1987. On that day, Black Monday, the market dropped 508 points, losing more than 22 percent of its value. To a considerable degree, some analysts later argued, the downward spiral was steepened by "program trading," which sends signals to buy or sell based on sophisticated algorithms. On October 19, as the market began to fall, the algorithms precipitated the selling off of large blocks of stock before the losses became even greater, thereby causing the collapse to accelerate. In the aftermath of the crash the government instituted "circuit breakers" to interrupt trading temporarily in the event of sudden heavy losses. Today trading stops for half an hour if the Dow falls 350 points from the previous day's close, and for one hour if it falls 500 points.

Circuit breakers would be useful to have when the news spins out of control—when a single story crosses some threshold of tolerance. What that threshold might be is open to debate. The tripwire could be the moment when the contract is inked for the first "instant book." Or the moment when the face of an individual in the story turns up on a Halloween mask sold in stores. It could be when the story gets its own theme music (or at least a theme chord), or when some previously unknown expert makes his twentieth appearance on a national news program. It could be when a cable-TV channel is created to cover nothing but this story twenty-four hours a day, or whenever the "crawls" scroll through fifty loops across the bottom of the screen without a change of subject.

Whatever the threshold, the response would be instantaneous. Fox, CNN, and MSNBC would go black for

GREG CLARKE

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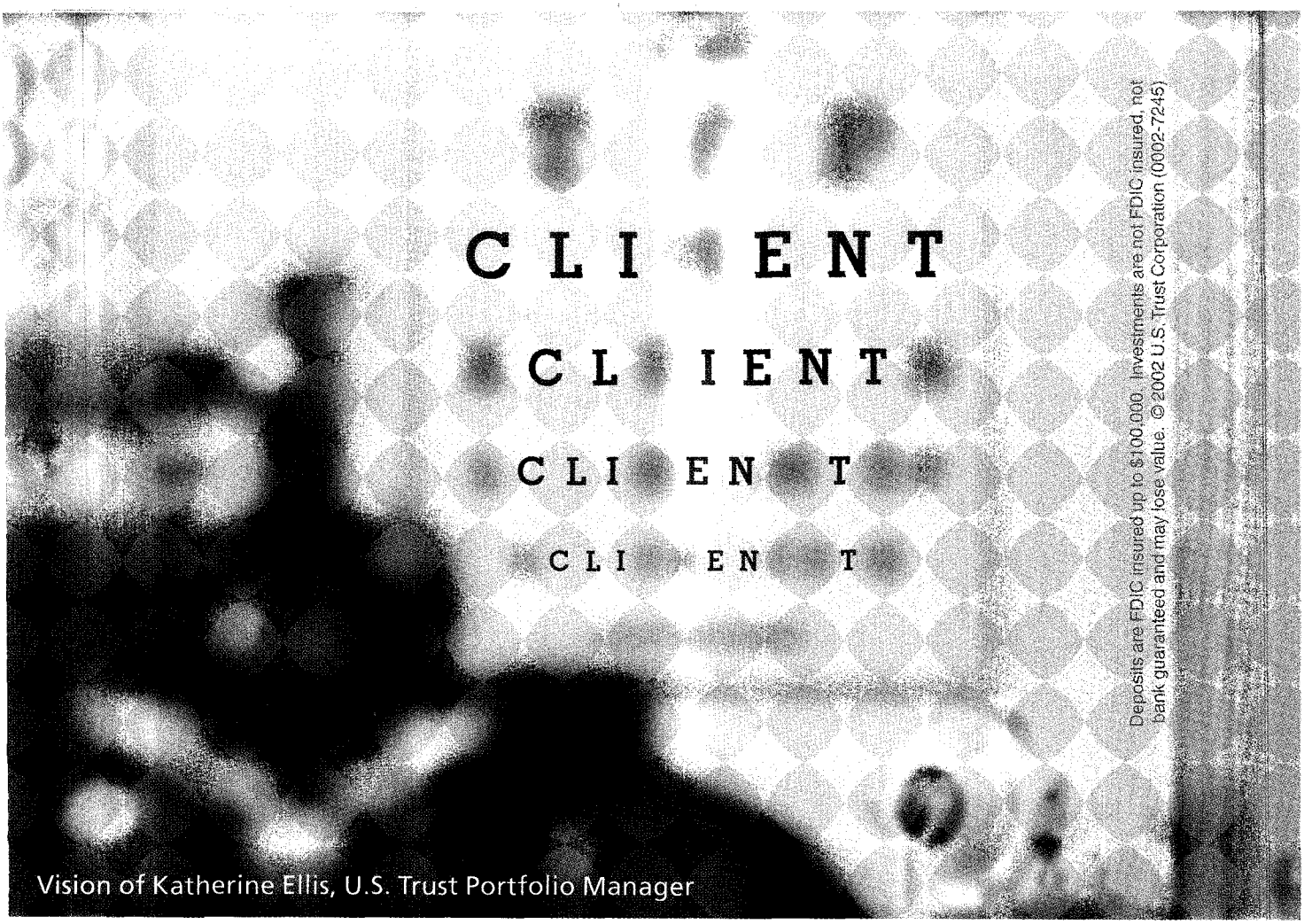

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half a day. If saturation coverage persisted elsewhere, the blackout would be extended to the three networks, and to the front pages of the next morning's newspapers. To safeguard the nation's fundamental right to know, *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer* would always be allowed to broadcast, although in extreme circumstances even this sober program might require dampening. One possibility would be to have the entire show presented by Senator Joseph Lieberman.

Circuit breakers, of course, represent an emergency response—not effective long-term management. For that we need the news-gathering equivalent of the Federal Reserve Board. One reason some news stories dominate the nation's attention is sheer lack of competition: to use the language of economics, there is a shortage of supply. Too many reporters are chasing too little news. Increase the supply, and the dynamic changes: no sooner does some new story come along than the old story starts to fade.

A centralized national "news bank"—a Disclosure Reserve Board—could keep watch over the news supply and help the country to avoid periods of either serious shortage or dangerous excess. The governors of the board would include representatives from the major national and regional newspapers, the three newsmagazines, the three network news programs, the cable news networks, and selected radio outlets. For obvious practical reasons they would also have to include representatives from *The National Enquirer*, *Hard Copy*, *Jerry Springer*, the *Drudge Report*, and possibly *The Onion*. As the price of a seat on the board, each governor would "deposit" a half dozen major news stories into the central news bank—stories their organizations had yet to break and would agree to sit on until moments of national need. Thus *The Washington Post* might ante up with "DEEP THROAT IDENTITY AT LAST CONFIRMED." *The National Enquirer* might offer "GORE LOVE CHILD EYES TENN. RUN" and "BRITNEY TO ENTER CALCUTTA CONVENT." Such contributions would represent only modest hardship: every news organization is holding stories it is nervous about breaking anyway.

In moments of mounting crisis—for instance, when round-the-clock coverage of the Robert Blake trial enters its seventeenth week—the Disclosure Reserve Board would intervene with an emergency stimulus package. Suddenly the Blake trial would be swept off the front page, consigned to a squib in News Briefs by "CLINTON WEIGHED MIDNIGHT SIRHAN PARDON" or "ENRON PROBE CITES OSAMA LINK" or "FOURTH FATIMA SECRET FINGERS O.J." Under ordinary circumstances news organizations might be wary of allegations that remained inadequately sourced, but the federal government could step in with indemnification against adverse legal consequences—much as it agreed, back in the 1950s, to indemnify the nuclear-power industry in order to make its start-up possible.

Some might look askance at the idea of a Disclosure Reserve Board, for putting so much power over the news into the hands of a self-appointed elite. (Others would reply, What else is new?) Regulation of some kind is certainly long overdue, and a Disclosure Reserve Board at least works with the existing system.

But if the proposed reforms fall short we may need to consider an entirely different approach. One possibility would be a radical version of a Department of Agriculture program—the government would pay news producers, in effect, not to plant certain kinds of crops. Alternatively, Washington could buy up the entire production of certain kinds of news, and then stockpile it, as the government does with vast quantities of the nation's milk and cheese. Indeed, we should think seriously about sending some of this stockpile to places like Afghanistan and the Balkans, which have long been major exporters of hard news but whose consumerist tastes at home remain woefully underdeveloped.

England, with its advanced tabloid industry, would almost certainly join us in this endeavor—once again becoming the only ally we can really count on. A

Cullen Murphy is The Atlantic*'s managing editor.*

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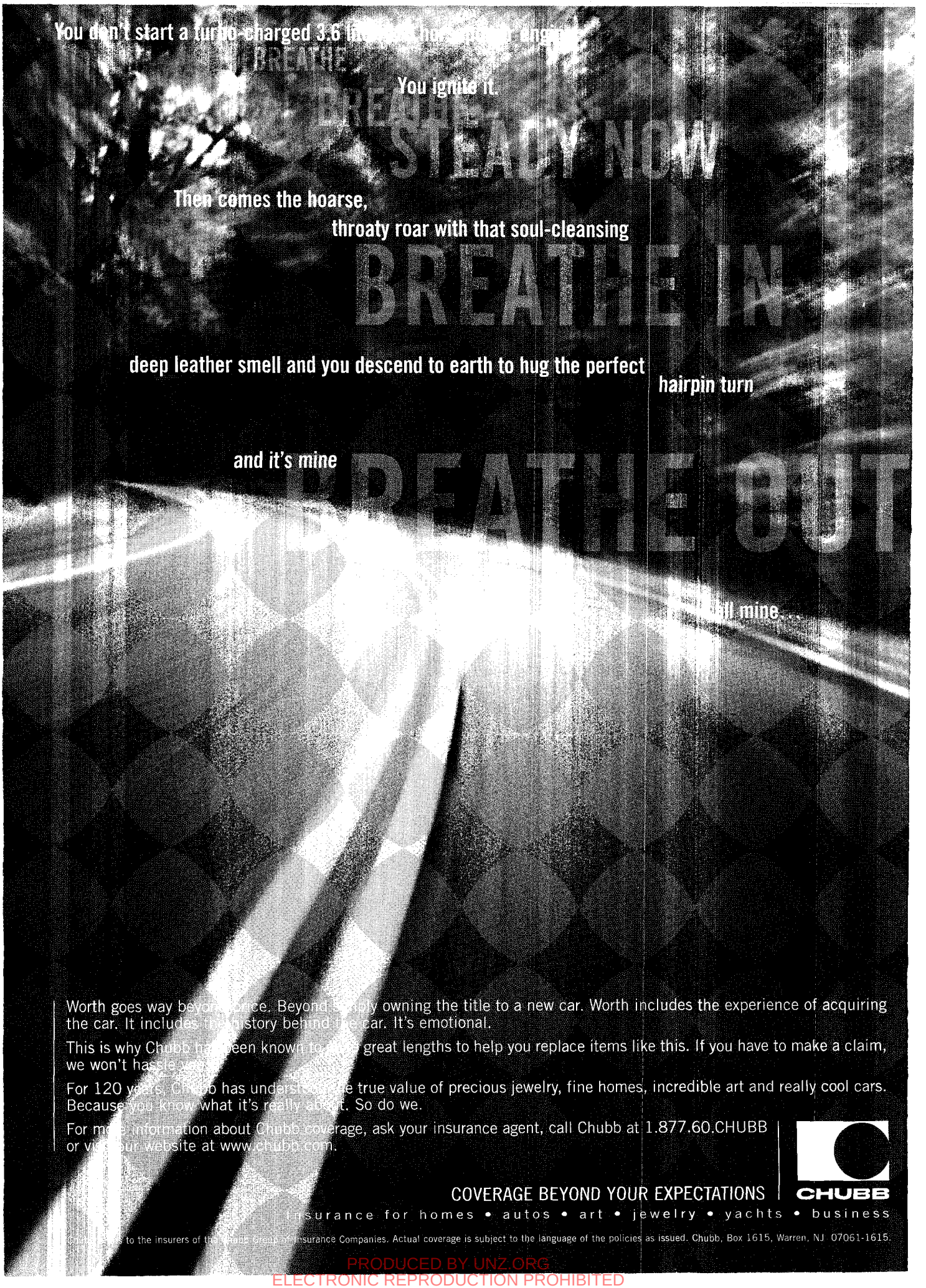

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THE AGENDA

ESSAYS THIS MONTH *on the politics of judgeships, the politics of vaccinations, and the politics of information; and on fakery as an emerging American folk culture.*

DAVID BROOKS

"The classic Niebuhr pose was to argue the middle against both ends—to argue for reform but against the pride of idealists, who hope to achieve too much, and against the cowardice of standpatters, who are afraid to get their hands dirty." PAGE 24

RANDALL KENNEDY

"Senators ought not to accord to any judicial nominee a presumptive entitlement to confirmation. The Constitution declares no such presumption." PAGE 28

WALTER KIRN

"The nation is soaked to the skin in fraud and fakery. It's standing waist-deep in a cistern of deceit under a drenching downpour of rigged ledgers, plagiarized best sellers, stolen gold medals, spoiled ballots, creepy-crawly priests." PAGE 35

MARY GRAHAM

"A year after the terrorist attacks temporary emergency actions have evolved into fundamental changes in the public's right to know." PAGE 36

ARTHUR ALLEN

"Boulder, which has the lowest schoolwide vaccination rate in Colorado, has one of the highest per capita rates of whooping cough in the United States." PAGE 40

WHAT NOW?

Developments, encouraging and otherwise

BY MICHAEL KELLY

.....

THERE IS NOTHING SO COMFORTING as reverting to form. It has been about a year since the day that changed everything, and we are back to normal again.

Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle, who after September 11 was obliged for some months to pose as a statesman, lunched recently with *The Washington Post*, and offered some thoughts on President George W. Bush. "Almost on every one of the issues involving domestic policy, he has been a source of great disappointment," Daschle judged. "I think his record on the economy is a disaster. I think his record on fiscal policy is a disaster. I think his position on education has fallen far short of expectations." Daschle added that Bush had failed to "capture the ringleaders of al Qaeda." The Democratic Party leader, who is expected to challenge Bush for the presidency in 2004, also charged the Republican incumbent with being overly confrontational and excessively political.

The *Daily Mirror* of London celebrated the independence of the former Colonials by pointing out on the front page of its July 4 edition that "the USA is now the world's leading rogue state."

Michael Jackson, who is unhappy over the disappointing market reaction to his simply awful new album, *Invincible*, explained at a gathering called the Music Industry Initiative Summit, in Harlem, that the poor sales were the result of a "racist conspiracy" by Sony Music to "turn the public against me." Jackson, appearing with the lawyer Johnnie Cochran and the Reverend Al Sharpton, said, "When you fight for me, you're fighting for all black people, dead and alive." He observed, "I know my race. I just look in the mirror. I know I'm black."

President Bush, whose talent for startlingly weak public performances fascinated political observers during his run for the presidency, but who had seemed, as they say, to grow in office, returned to his old self. In only the third formal news conference since September 11 Bush faced thirty-six minutes of mostly hostile questioning on his history as a director of the Harken Energy Corporation—specifically, on suspicions that he had engaged in insider trading in 1989, when he sold some 212,000 shares of Harken stock two months before the company finished a second quarter with disappointing results sure to

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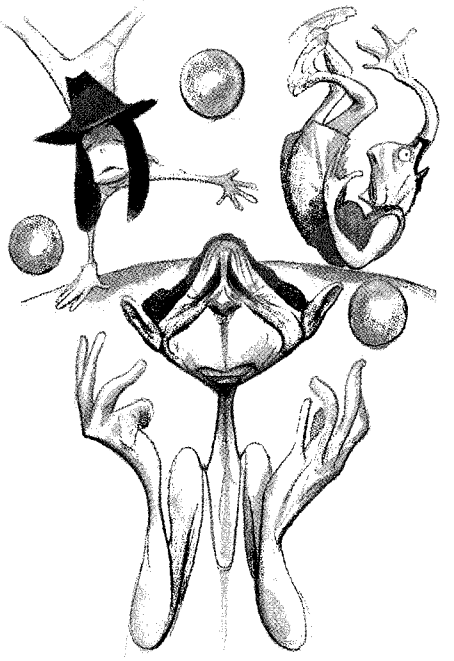
drive stock prices down. Although Bush's Harken past had been the subject of increasingly breathless press coverage and Democratic attacks for days, and although the story had a near perfect resonance with the larger ongoing story of corporate scandals, the President nevertheless appeared surprised by this line of questioning. Asked about the details of his eight-month delay in filing an SEC-required form disclosing his sale of Harken stock, Bush said that he had not "figured it out completely." Asked if he had been involved, as a director, with a 1989 "phantom profit" deal that the SEC later determined had allowed Harken to hide the true magnitude of its losses from investors, Bush said, "You need to look back on the, the directors' minutes," and added that "in the corporate world, sometimes things aren't exactly black and white when it comes to accounting procedures."

Appearing before a congressional investigating committee as Bush spoke were Bernard J. Ebbers and Scott D. Sullivan, the former CEO and former chief financial officer of WorldCom, a former very large company that was on that day worth precisely twenty-three cents per share of common stock (down from a 1999 high of almost $65 per share), following revelations that the company's not exactly black-and-white accounting procedures had hidden the magnitude of its losses—to the tune of $3.9 billion. Joining Ebbers and Sullivan was Melvin Dick, a former partner at the paler-shades-of-gray former very large accounting company Arthur Andersen. Also appearing was the Salomon Smith Barney analyst Jack Grubman, who touted WorldCom's stock during the four years in which, as it happened, Salomon Smith Barney received some $80 million in consulting fees from WorldCom, and in which Grubman himself received an average of $20 million a year in compensation from Salomon Smith Barney, tied in part to the WorldCom fees. Although WorldCom's stock slid steadily during these years, Grubman downgraded it only four days before the company's accounting fraud was revealed.



Veteran congressional observers called the witnesses' performance before the House Financial Services Committee a classic. Ebbers, pleading the Fifth, informed members that he had nothing to hide and said, "I would like, more than you know, to answer the questions that you and your colleagues have about WorldCom." Dick observed that there was no way that he, as an independent auditor, could have been expected to uncover WorldCom's accounting trick, which consisted of subtly pasting "long-term capital expense" stickers on $3.9 billion worth of boxes of "short-term operating expenses"—the sort of black-is-white kind of thing that any lynx-eyed veteran CPA could have missed. "We planned our audit of WorldCom in general reliance on the honesty and integrity of the management of the company," Dick explained. Grubman, who acknowledged that his relationship with WorldCom executives and officers was so close that he had on several occasions joined company board meetings to provide "market color," said that he, too, had been led astray. "Our judgments are only as good as the public information on which they are based," he said, explaining that his four-year lapse of discernment was the sort of mistake that any lynx-eyed market analyst with exclusive inside access could have made. "But for WorldCom's fraud, I would have seen a more dire picture much earlier." Committee members got off a number of good ones at the expense of the witnesses.

The Washington Post reported that Thomas M. Siebel—who has been a major soft-money contributor to the Republican Party, and who is the CEO of the software maker Siebel Systems, which is lobbying hard for its piece of the $38 billion homeland-security pie—has (already!) pioneered a way around the campaign-reform law that will take effect after the November elections. Soon to be barred from writing soft-money checks like the $250,000 whopper he wrote in June for a $30 million party fundraiser, Siebel has overnight created the nation's second largest political action committee (the first belongs to UPS) by the simple strategem of sending e-mail to hundreds of his company's "most fervent" employees and strongly encouraging them to make the maximum allowable contribution of $5,000 to the PAC right away. More than 350 upper-level employees agreed with their boss's logic, and before you could say McCain-Feingold, there was more than $2.1 million in the kitty. Political professionals praised the Siebel initiative ("setting the example"—National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Thomas M. Davis III), but the company's chief Washington lobbyist modestly gave credit where it was due: "We simply followed the rules step by step," Thomas Gann said.

At a breakfast with supporters in Memphis, Tennessee, Al Gore, discussing his less than fully successful bid for the presidency in 2000, boldly declared, "If I had to do it all over again, I'd just let it rip. To hell with the polls, the tactics, and all the rest." Gore added, yet more boldly, "Let the chips fall where they may."

As I said, it is about a year since the day that changed everything, and we are back to normal. Which, actually, is wonderful.

Michael Kelly is the editor of The Atlantic.

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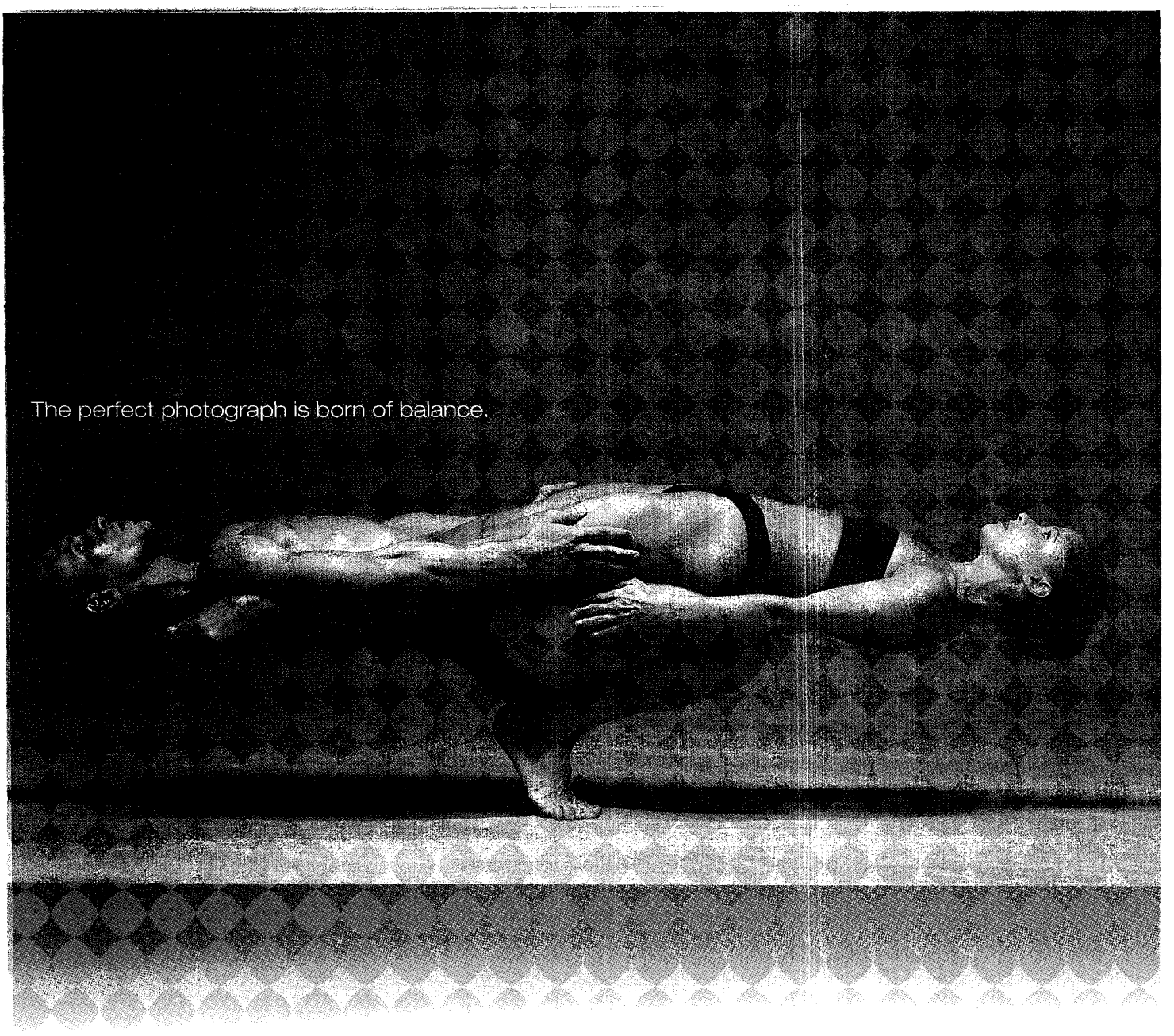

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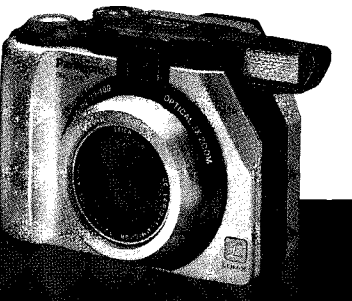

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A MAN ON A GRAY HORSE

The mid-century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr may have gotten a lot of things wrong—but we could use a thinker like him today

IDEAS

DAVID BROOKS

I'm amazed that Reinhold Niebuhr hasn't made a comeback since September 11. After all, he was one of America's most profound writers on war and international conflict. At the start of World War II and then again at the dawn of the Cold War he wrote sweeping books that helped readers to connect their historical situations with broad truths about God and human nature. Yet a Nexis search on Niebuhr turns up only a handful of references to him over the past year. And the few substantive essays that have appeared were written for conservative publications, whereas Niebuhr propounded a hard-nosed liberal view of the world. The situation is depressing: Niebuhr's arguments were big and ambitious, whereas our debates are small and wonky.

Niebuhr grew up in Lincoln, Illinois, and attended Elmhurst College and Yale Divinity School. As a young man he became a pastor at the Bethel Evangelical Church, in Detroit, and was active in the Social Gospel movement, which saw in Christianity a blueprint for progressive and scientific political reform.

Niebuhr soon tired of what he saw as the self-righteous naiveté of the Social Gospel activists. He wrote a series of essays exposing their idealistic pieties and became a spokesman for moral realism, arguing that reform had to be conducted by people who were acutely aware of the limits of human capabilities and the intractability of sin. Niebuhr believed that "man is a sinner in his deepest nature," as the humanities professor Wilfred M. McClay wrote this past February in *First Things*. "But man was not merely a sinner, but also a splendidly endowed creature formed in God's image ... still able to advance the cause of social improvement."

The classic Niebuhr pose was to argue the middle against both ends—to argue for reform but against the pride of idealists, who hope to achieve too much, and against the cowardice of standpatters, who are afraid to get their hands dirty. Niebuhr could be bloody-minded in his realism: every action causes some collateral damage, he acknowledged, but people must act nonetheless, begging forgiveness for the evils they commit in the service of good.

Niebuhr's world view was well suited to the era of total war. In 1939 he delivered a series of lectures in Edinburgh on his version of Christian realism. As he spoke, bombs from German aircraft could be heard falling around the city. Niebuhr noticed that his audience was getting restless, but he was so caught up in his lecture that he thought they were squirming over something he'd said. The lectures were eventually collected in two volumes titled *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941, 1943). After you've finished a book with a title like that, what's left to read?

Ten years later, at the start of the Cold War, Niebuhr gave another set of lectures, this time in Fulton, Missouri; they served as the starting point for a book called *The Irony of American History* (1952). He began the book by making his position against communism clear: "We are defending freedom against tyranny and are trying to preserve justice against a system which has, demonically, distilled injustice and cruelty out of its original promise of a higher justice." Niebuhr would have chosen the word "demonically" with care; in effect, he dubbed the Soviet Union an evil empire thirty years before Ronald Reagan did.

Niebuhr was afraid, however, that in battling evil the United States would become intoxicated with illusions about its own goodness. He wrote,

> We take, and must continue to take, morally hazardous actions to preserve our civilization. We must exercise our power. But we ought neither to believe that a nation is capable of perfect disinterestedness in its exercise, nor become complacent about particular degrees of interest and passion which corrupt the justice by which the exercise of power is legitimized.

He believed that Americans were ill suited to addressing the issues that go along with being a superpower. As he phrased it,

> Our lack of the lust of power makes the fulminations of our foes against us singularly inept. On the other hand, we have been so deluded by the concept of our innocency that we are ill prepared to deal with the temptations of power which now assail us.

Niebuhr's great foe was idealism. American idealism, he believed, comes in two forms: the idealism of non-interventionists, who are embarrassed by power, and the idealism of imperialists, who disguise power as virtue.

The non-interventionists, he argued, seek to preserve the purity of their souls, either by denouncing military actions or by demanding that every action taken be unequivocally virtuous. They exaggerate the sins committed by their own country, excuse the malevolence of its enemies, and, as later polemicists have put it, inevitably blame America first. This is all just a pious way of refusing to face real problems, Niebuhr wrote. Though his subject was the isolationist response to Nazi Germany, he might as well have been referring to some of the left-wing reactions to today's war on terror.

With respect to the idealistic imperialists, on both the right and the left, Niebuhr conceded that the United States was founded on utopian hopes, on the dream of transforming a new land into a second Eden, where the oppression and misery of the Old World would be supplanted by happiness, prosperity, virtue, and freedom. However, he argued, Americans are simple-minded in their view of happiness. They tend to believe that with enough affluence and good will, all tensions can ultimately be reconciled. They believe that if each person pursues self-interest, then all will achieve contentment, by some invisible hand. In fact, Niebuhr contended, "Happiness is no simple possibility of human existence." In the world he saw, moments of happiness were possible only for those who renounced self-

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interest, who "die[d] to self." In the most famous passage of *The Irony of American History* he declared,

> Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

Many Americans, Niebuhr believed, fail to see the irony of this situation and the limitations of what can be achieved. Instead they believe that the United States has a mission to spread democracy around the world. They think that this country is uniquely blessed and have come to regard it as the tutor to mankind. Nations in the grip of this sort of hubris seek "greater power than is given to mortals," he said. They become inflamed by hatred for their foes, and corrupted even if their foes really do deserve to be hated. And they become enraged when they discover barriers to the realization of their ideals.

They become, in short, a menace to the fragile fabric of the world. Niebuhr approvingly quoted a European diplomat who argued in the 1940s that American idealism imperiled Europe. "For American power in the service of American idealism could create a situation in which we would be too impotent to correct you when you are wrong and you would be too idealistic to correct yourself," the diplomat said.

European diplomats say much the same thing today. If he were alive, Niebuhr would no doubt have qualms about the good-versus-evil rhetoric that President George Bush has used to mobilize public opinion in the war on terror. He would certainly have qualms about our spreading the gospel of democracy in the Middle East and Africa (Niebuhr did not regard democracy as "relevant" to what he called "ancient" and "primitive" cultures). He would be alarmed by American unilateralism: he believed it was necessary to work with European nations in order to check our own hubris.

A disclaimer is in order: I disagree with two thirds of what Niebuhr wrote. To begin with, he was naive. Just as the problem with pragmatists is that their plans never work, the problem with realists is that they are unrealistic. In the real world people do not undertake great tasks in the mood of cold, ironic realism that so delighted Niebuhr. People need to have their hopes fired and their passions engaged. The American Revolution could not have succeeded or even gotten off the ground without firebrands like Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine. Slavery would not have ended without the zeal of the abolitionists.

Niebuhr overlearned the lessons of his age. Because communism and fascism were fomented by zealous idealists, he came to suspect all displays of passion, all righteous indignation, and all poetic elements in public life. But idealism in defense of democracy is no vice, at least not on balance.

Our problem today is not, as Niebuhr might have predicted, excessive zealotry or an overpoliticized life. Our problem is that most people are entirely disengaged from great public matters. Consumed by private pleasures, they almost never invest their passions in dreams of a better world. We could use a little more idealistic zeal, a little more hope and confidence.

And Niebuhr was wrong to try to disabuse Americans of a sense of democratic mission. He treated this sense as merely a self-flattering appendage to the American character. In fact it is the essence of the American character. Our Founders pledged their sacred honor because they thought they were leading a democratic revolution for all mankind. The highest points of American history—the abolition of slavery, the Marshall Plan, the civil-rights movement—were all driven by the sense that America is, in Lincoln's words, "the last best hope of earth." Even with our periodic fits of arrogance, the world is a better place because the United States has pursued its democratic mission.

Still, even those of us who would like to see the United States practice a more idealistic foreign policy—one that is more passionate about defending human rights and about truly inciting democracy around the world—could use a Reinhold Niebuhr to police our excesses. Niebuhr was often castigated for being every atheist's favorite theologian and every conservative anti-communist's favorite liberal. It would be helpful to have more thinkers of his sort, or at least one—a thinker who simultaneously believes in using power and is keenly aware that its use is inevitably corrupting. If nothing else, such a thinker might bring those who are wary of gung-ho Americanism into a grudging alliance with the interventionists. If there is going to be a hawkish left in America again, a left suspicious of power but willing to use it to defend freedom, it will have to be revived by a modern-day Reinhold Niebuhr.

David Brooks, an Atlantic *correspondent, is also a contributing editor of* Newsweek, *a senior editor of* The Weekly Standard, *and a political analyst for* The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer.

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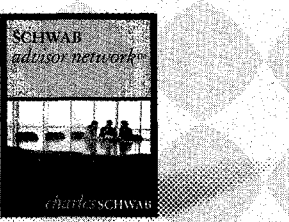

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REJECTION SUSTAINED

Republicans are suddenly steamed that "politics" is holding up judicial appointments. But politics is the point

THE LAW

RANDALL KENNEDY

Few aspects of American political life generate more fatuous obfuscation than the selection of judges to sit on the federal bench. President George W. Bush decries opposition to his nominees by Democratic senators, charging that their resistance derives, shamefully, from "politics." Yet he almost always nominates Republicans for judgeships. Conservatives denounce liberals who openly admit that for them ideology is a major basis for assessing the President's nominees. Yet simultaneously the President makes clear that ideology matters greatly to him in choosing them; after all, he has declared publicly that he is looking to appoint "conservatives." Senate Republicans accuse Senate Democrats of creating a "vacancy crisis" by delaying hearings for judicial nominees, but during the years when Bill Clinton was President, Orrin Hatch, Trent Lott, and their Republican allies conspicuously slowed the confirmation process to a crawl. After the Senate blocked Robert Bork's confirmation, in 1987, bitter supporters complained that Democrats had prejudged Bork negatively, which was largely true. His champions, of course, had *also* pre-judged him, but positively. Republicans charge that Democrats have a litmus test for assessing a nominee—namely, the jurist's views on the legal status of abortion rights. But Republican Presidents have the same litmus test; they just want the opposite result.

In the face of these charges and countercharges, many Americans are inclined to chastise the ideologues on the left and the right. They would contend that our heated and protracted disputes over judgeships are dangerous, that those on both sides of the fighting are wrong, that the left and the right should stop "playing politics" with judicial selection, that considerable deference should be given to any President's choice, and that in deciding whether or not to confirm the President's pick, senators ought to confine themselves to evaluating the nominee's integrity and competence. Proponents of this view evoke with warmth memories of a time when nominees, even for the Supreme Court, were confirmed by acclamation, and when "law" was thought to occupy a plane altogether different from and higher than "politics."

This school of thought—call it the deference school—ought to be rejected. To some extent the past it evokes is imaginary, the product of yearning for a consensus that has frequently been absent. The Senate rejected George Washington's nomination of John Rutledge to be Chief Justice even though Rutledge had been confirmed as an associate justice and was already serving as Chief Justice thanks to a recess appointment. Why did the Senate rebuff the nominee of the Father of His Country? Because Rutledge had harshly criticized the Jay Treaty with Great Britain, prompting a majority in the Senate to doubt the political soundness of his judgment. Since then senators have often voted against nominees on substantive political grounds, openly stating their concern that such candidates would be likely to rule the wrong way on matters of high public importance.

Sometimes, as in the case of Rutledge, ideological opposition has prevailed. President Herbert Hoover's Supreme Court nominee Judge John Parker was rebuffed by the Senate in 1930 because of his perceived aversion to the labor movement and to civil rights for blacks. More often ideological opposition has failed. But contrary to the claims of the deference school, senatorial opposition based on publicly aired ideological disagreement is by no means new.

Senators ought not to accord to any nominee a presumptive entitlement to confirmation. The Constitution declares no such presumption. It vests the President alone with the power to nominate federal judges, but it also directs the President to obtain "the Advice and Consent" of the Senate. As a functional matter, the Constitution thus gives the Senate a veto over the President's judicial selections. Expecting senators to ignore politics when exercising this responsibility is silly. Judges, after all, are policymakers who, like legislators and other officeholders, exercise discretion, express values, and weigh consequences in reaching conclusions. Whether one thinks a given nominee would be likely to carry out these tasks well—or even tolerably—depends on one's own political preferences and tenets. Of course, we (through our sena-

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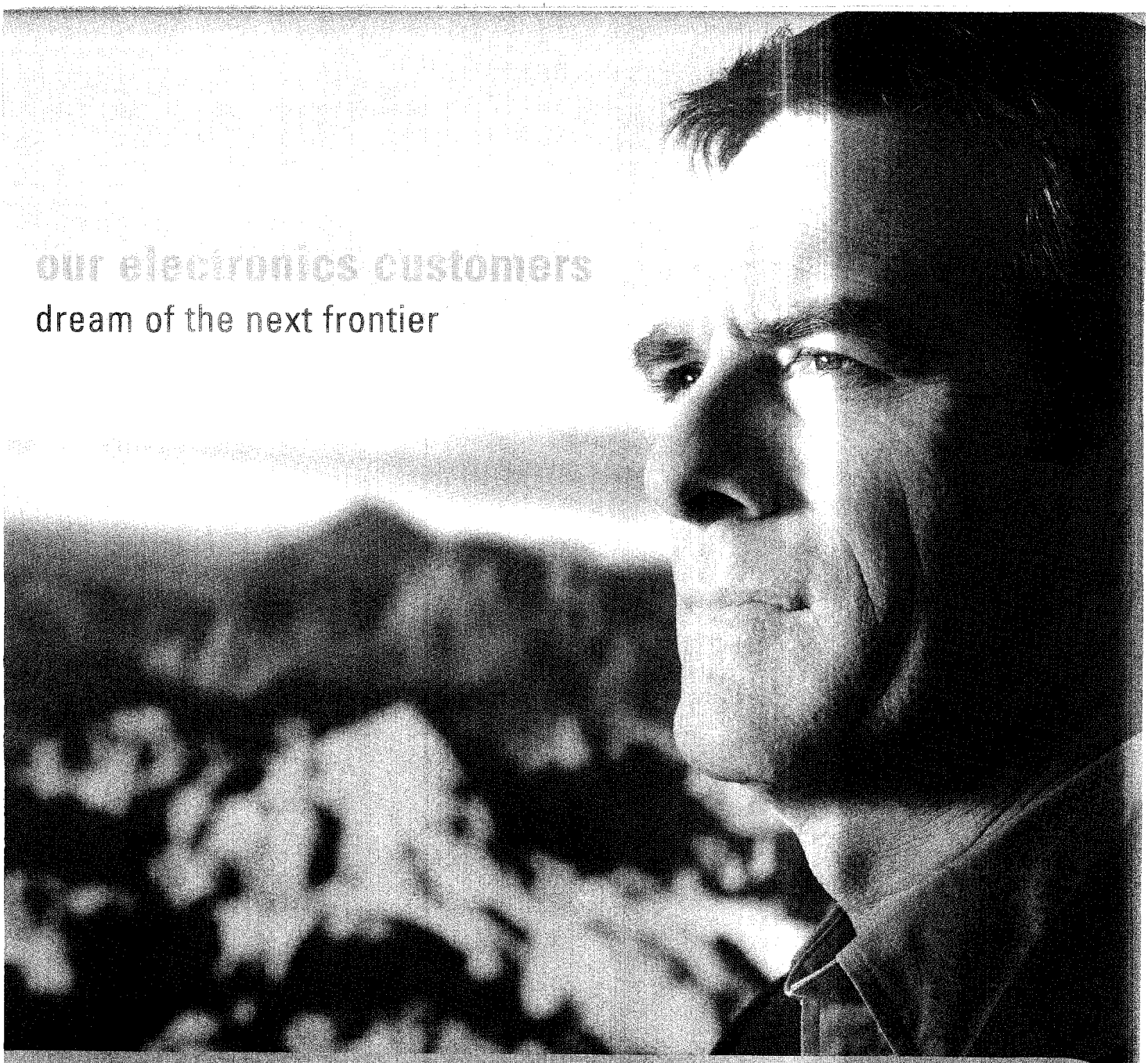

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tors) need to evaluate the basic honesty and competence of nominees. But we need equally to assess their philosophy, ideology, politics (in this context I see these words as synonyms). Jurists may be perfectly competent, honest, and honorable—and yet may also be properly regarded as wholly unfit to wield judicial power.

One of the worst features of the current regime is the incentive it gives for scandal-mongering. People who are nervous about opposing a nominee straightforwardly on ideological grounds search for any sort of peccadillo to serve as a non-ideological pretext for opposition. We would be far better off if senators openly opposed nominees for substantive reasons, rather than ones that would probably have been overlooked in the absence of substantive disagreement.

Since senators ought to take into account the likely voting pattern of a nominee, they ought also to have access to information that helps them predict that pattern. Yet nominees (often on instruction from White House handlers) thwart information-gathering by declining to answer certain questions during confirmation hearings. They do not mind, of course, questions that will generate entirely uncontroversial answers. For example, during her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, in 1993, Ruth Bader Ginsburg eagerly declared her belief that *Marbury* v. *Madison* (the case establishing the authority of the Supreme Court to invalidate congressional statutes) was rightly decided and that *Dred Scott* v. *Sandford* (the case holding that blacks could not be citizens of the United States) was wrongly decided. However, nominees seek to avoid articulating beliefs about controversial subjects. For example, Ginsburg declined to answer Senator Strom Thurmond's rather general query about the constitutionality of vouchers in public schooling. Explaining at the outset of her hearing why she would refuse to answer certain questions, Ginsburg declared, "Judges in our system are bound to decide concrete cases, not abstract issues. Each case comes to the Court based on particular facts, and its decision should turn on those facts and the governing law, stated and explained in light of the particular arguments the parties or their representatives present. A judge sworn to decide impartially can offer no forecasts, no hints, for that would show not only disregard for the specifics of the particular case, it would display disdain for the entire judicial process."

That explanation is unpersuasive. Since, in Ginsburg's view, justices ought to decide only specific, concrete cases, she should not worry about sharing with the public her general views about disputes that are likely to come before the Court in some form. When those disputes arrive, they will necessarily be garbed in the particularities of a given controversy and thus will be subject to considerations different from (though related to) those posed by a question at a hearing.

Besides, many nominees have already served on lower courts, and have thus displayed more than a hint of their considered opinions; they may have made several pertinent and revealing rulings on a given subject. Such judgments offer a very clear forecast of how these jurists are likely to rule in the future. But presumably Ginsburg (herself an appellate judge before her advancement to the Supreme Court) would agree that having issued a ruling on a subject in the past does not, and should not, preclude a jurist from adjudicating future cases in which that same subject emerges.

Those who have not left a paper trail sometimes simply plead ignorance—claiming that they have thought little about a vexing subject, and attempting to make a virtue out of emptiness. When confronting this line, senators ought to say that a nominee is either disqualified for dishonesty or—if he or she truly lacks well-developed ideas about privacy, or federalism, or equal protection—insufficiently learned or thoughtful to be placed on the bench. The savvy conservatives at *The Weekly Standard* were absolutely right when, in 1997, they asserted,

> The Senate should genuinely slow down the confirmation process, ignore the manufactured hysteria about vacancy statistics, and perform a truly searching philosophical analysis of pending and future judicial nominees … The Senate should demand [that nominees] thoroughly explain their understanding of constitutional principle and jurisprudential practice—whether they want to or not. And any judicial nominee who refuses this invitation to public debate about the law, we think, should be rejected.

Although they may have changed their minds after the Republican take-over of the White House, their demand for searching scrutiny of nominees remains correct today.

A realistic understanding of what judges do, and of how and why they are selected, makes clear that all interested segments of the polity should, without embarrassment, support or oppose candidates on the basis of educated perceptions of what those candidates are likely to do if confirmed. Trying to banish politics from the process is futile; after all, it is inconceivable that the President's influence could be depoliticized. And even if it were possible to make the Senate's role apolitical, doing so would be wrong-headed. Judges are endowed with tenure for life and with the authority to strike down legislation. The active role of dissident senators in examining and confirming them is a vital hedge against political error—especially when the White House and the judiciary are dominated by the same party.

Randall Kennedy is a professor of law at Harvard Law School.

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CABINET RESTRUCTURING UPDATE

by STEVE BRODNER

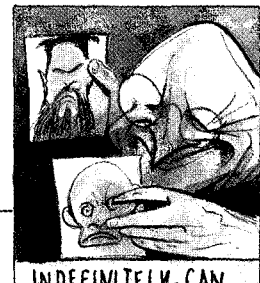
THE STATE AND JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS MERGE

INTO

THE DEPARTMENT of WORRY

DICK CHENEY, SECRETARY

THE DEPARTMENT WILL RECOGNIZE THAT WORRISOME PEOPLE, HELD



INDEFINITELY, CAN BE USED TO SCARE EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY CRITICS,

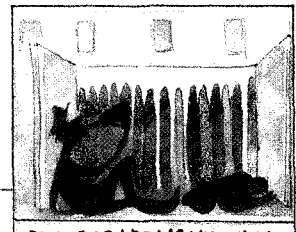
WHO, IF THEY'RE NOT CAREFUL, COULD ALSO MAKE THE LIST.

THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT AND THE OFFICE of FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES MERGE

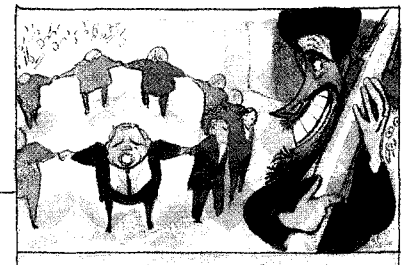
INTO

THE LITURGIC AIR COMMAND

JOHN ASHCROFT, CHAPLAIN



THE DEPARTMENT WILL SEND A DELEGATION TO CRUMBLING WARHEAD FACILITIES IN BELARUS



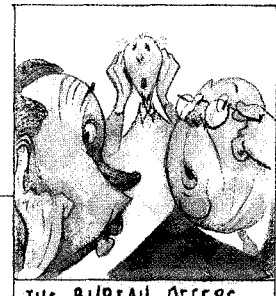
AND PRAY REAL HARD THAT ALL NUCLEAR TERRORISTS JUST LEARN TO BE NICE.

THE FBI, CIA, AND THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT MERGE

INTO

THE BUREAU of PHYSICAL REHAB AND COMPUTER TRAINING

DEEPAK CHOPRA, DIRECTOR



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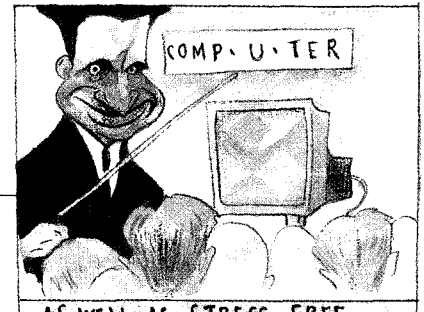

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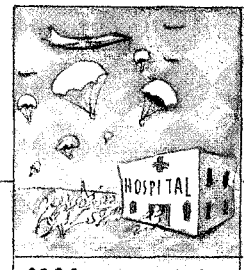

PERSONNEL ARE RUSHED TO LOCALITIES DEVASTATED BY

FISCAL SHORTFALLS DUE TO THE TEN-YEAR TAX CUT.

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I thought diet and exercise were enough to lower my cholesterol. Turned out I needed more.

Now I take my family history of high cholesterol and heart disease a lot more seriously. Because even though I was doing everything right, my cholesterol was still too high, and I had a heart attack. As I was recovering, I asked my doctor about adding ZOCOR. He said ZOCOR, along with a healthy diet and exercise, could really lower cholesterol. And it's working. Now my cholesterol is right where it should be. And so am I.

ZOCOR is an effective treatment for [illegible] lower [illegible] and [illegible]. A clinical study among people with high cholesterol and heart disease found 42% fewer deaths from heart attack among those taking ZOCOR.* One tablet, taken once a day, can help people with high cholesterol and heart disease live longer, healthier lives.

[illegible] ZOCOR is a prescription medicine and isn't right for everyone, including women who are nursing or pregnant or who may become pregnant, anyone with liver problems, and people who are allergic to any ingredients of ZOCOR. Unexplained muscle pain or weakness could be a sign of a rare but serious side effect and should be reported to your doctor right away. Your doctor may do blood tests before and during treatment with ZOCOR to check for liver problems. To avoid serious side effects, discuss with your doctor medicine or food you should avoid while on ZOCOR (see details immediately following this ad).

Ask your doctor if ZOCOR [illegible]

YOUR RESULTS MAY VARY.

PLEASE READ THE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT ZOCOR IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THIS AD.

*42% reduction based on 111/2,221 (ZOCOR) vs 189/2,223 (placebo).

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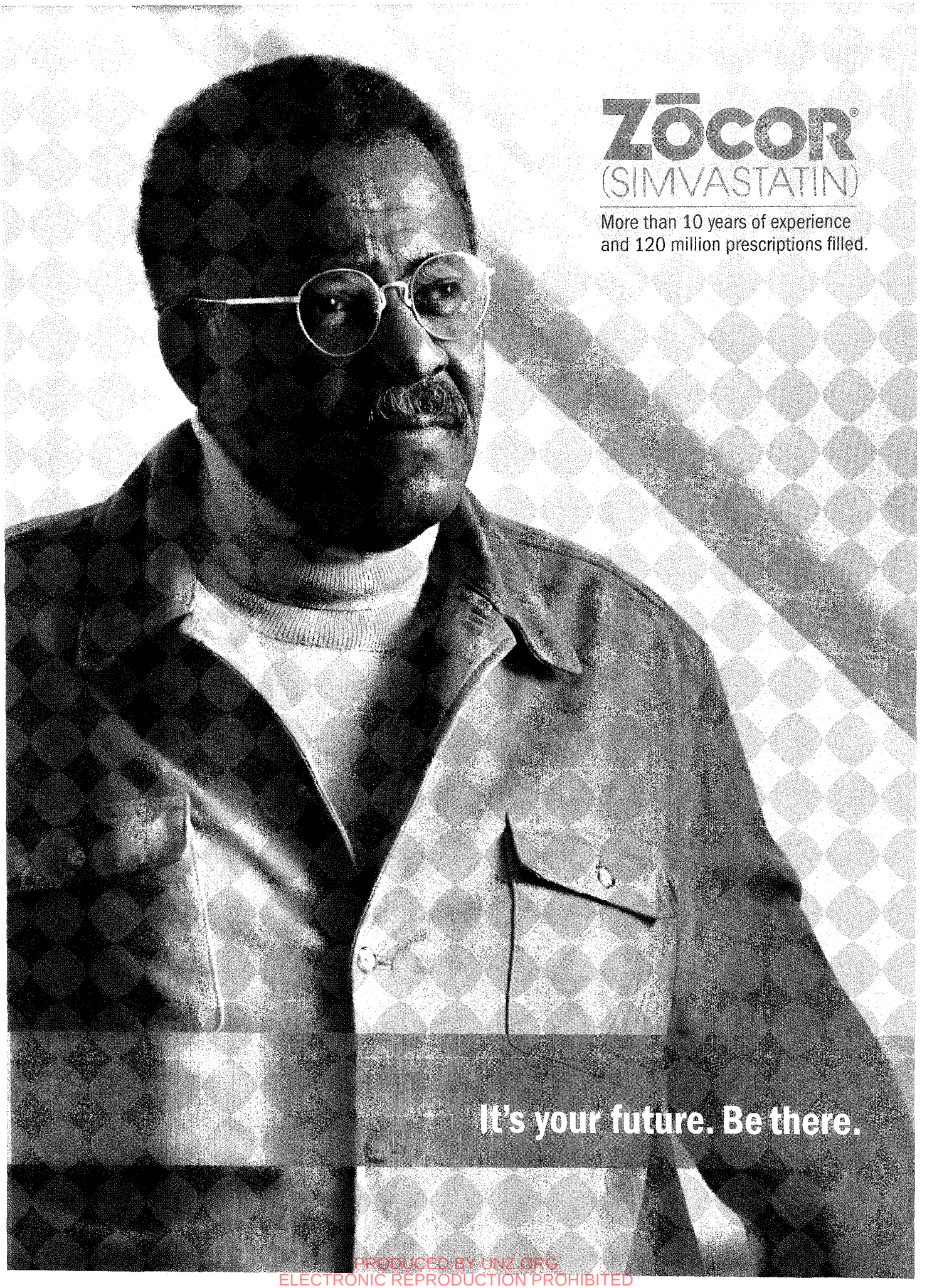

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ZOCOR®
(SIMVASTATIN)

PLEASE READ THIS SUMMARY CAREFULLY, AND THEN ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT ZOCOR. NO ADVERTISEMENT CAN PROVIDE ALL THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO PRESCRIBE A DRUG. THIS ADVERTISEMENT DOES NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF CAREFUL DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUR DOCTOR. ONLY YOUR DOCTOR HAS THE TRAINING TO WEIGH THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF A PRESCRIPTION DRUG FOR YOU.

USES OF ZOCOR

ZOCOR is a prescription drug that is indicated as an addition to diet for many patients with high cholesterol when diet and exercise are inadequate. For patients with coronary heart disease (CHD) and high cholesterol, ZOCOR is indicated as an addition to diet to reduce the risk of death by reducing coronary death; to reduce the risk of heart attack; to reduce the risk for undergoing cardiac procedures (coronary artery bypass grafting and percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty); and to reduce the risk of stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA).

WHEN ZOCOR SHOULD NOT BE USED

Some people should not take ZOCOR. Discuss this with your doctor.

ZOCOR should not be used by patients who are allergic to any of its ingredients. In addition to the active ingredient simvastatin, each tablet contains the following inactive ingredients: cellulose, lactose, magnesium stearate, iron oxides, talc, titanium dioxide, and starch. Butylated hydroxyanisole is added as a preservative.

Patients with liver problems: *ZOCOR should not be used by patients with active liver disease or repeated* blood test results indicating possible liver problems. (See WARNINGS.)

Women who are or may become pregnant: Pregnant women should not take ZOCOR because it may harm the fetus. **Women of childbearing age should not take ZOCOR unless it is highly unlikely that they will become pregnant.** If a woman does become pregnant while on ZOCOR, she should stop taking the drug and talk to her doctor at once.

Women who are breast-feeding should not take ZOCOR.

WARNINGS

Muscle: ***Tell your doctor right away if you experience any unexplained muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness at any time during treatment with ZOCOR so your doctor can decide if ZOCOR should be stopped. Some patients may have muscle pain or weakness while taking ZOCOR. Rarely, this can include muscle breakdown resulting in kidney damage. The risk of muscle breakdown is greater in patients taking certain other drugs along with ZOCOR:***

- **Cyclosporine, itraconazole, ketoconazole, erythromycin, clarithromycin, HIV protease inhibitors, the antidepressant nefazodone, or large quantities of grapefruit juice (>1 quart daily), particularly with higher doses of ZOCOR.**
- **Gemfibrozil, other fibrates, or lipid-lowering doses (≥1 g/day) of niacin, particularly with higher doses of ZOCOR.**
- **Amiodarone or verapamil with higher doses of ZOCOR.**

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater at higher doses of simvastatin.

Because the risk of muscle side effects is greater when ZOCOR is used with the products listed above, the combined use of these products should be avoided unless your doctor determines the benefits are likely to outweigh the increased risks.

If your doctor determines that the benefits of combined use of ZOCOR with gemfibrozil, other fibrates, or niacin likely outweigh the increased risk of muscle problems, the dose of ZOCOR should not exceed 10 mg daily. No more than 10 mg/day of ZOCOR should be taken with cyclosporine.

The combined use of verapamil or amiodarone with doses above ZOCOR 20 mg should be avoided unless your doctor determines the benefits outweigh the increased risk of muscle breakdown.

Your doctor should also carefully monitor for any muscle pain, tenderness, or weakness, particularly during the initial months of therapy and if the dose of either drug is increased. Your doctor also may monitor the level of certain muscle enzymes in your body, but there is no assurance that such monitoring will prevent the occurrence of severe muscle disease.

The risk of muscle breakdown is greater in patients with kidney problems or diabetes.

If you have conditions that can increase your risk of muscle breakdown, which in turn can cause kidney damage, your doctor should temporarily withhold or stop ZOCOR. Also, since there are no known adverse consequences of briefly stopping therapy with ZOCOR, treatment should be stopped a few days before elective major surgery and when any major acute medical or surgical condition occurs. Discuss this with your doctor, who can explain these conditions to you.

Liver: About 1% of patients who took ZOCOR in clinical trials developed elevated levels of some liver enzymes. Patients who had these increases usually had no symptoms. Elevated liver enzymes usually returned to normal levels when therapy with ZOCOR was stopped.

In the ZOCOR Survival Study, the number of patients with more than 1 liver enzyme level elevation to greater than 3 times the normal upper limit was no different between the ZOCOR and placebo groups. Only 8 patients on ZOCOR and 5 on placebo discontinued therapy due to elevated liver enzyme levels. Patients were started on 20 mg of ZOCOR, and one third had their dose raised to 40 mg.

Your doctor should perform routine blood tests to check these enzymes before you start treatment with ZOCOR and periodically thereafter (for example, semiannually) for your first year of treatment or until 1 year after your last elevation in dose. Patients titrated to the 80-mg dose should receive an additional test at 3 months. If your enzyme levels increase, your doctor should order more frequent tests. If your liver enzyme levels remain unusually high, your doctor should discontinue your medication.

Tell your doctor about any liver disease you may have had in the past and about how much alcohol you consume. ZOCOR should be used with caution in patients who consume large amounts of alcohol.

PRECAUTIONS

Before starting treatment with ZOCOR, try to lower your cholesterol by other methods such as diet, exercise, and weight loss. Ask your doctor about how best to do this. Any other medical problems that can cause high cholesterol should also be treated.

Drug Interactions: Because of possible serious drug interactions, it is important to tell your doctor what other drugs you are taking, including those obtained without a prescription. You should also tell other doctors who are prescribing a new medicine for you that you are taking ZOCOR® (simvastatin).

ZOCOR can interact with the following:

- Itraconazole
- Ketoconazole
- Erythromycin
- Clarithromycin
- HIV protease inhibitors
- Nefazodone
- Cyclosporine
- Large quantities of grapefruit juice (>1 quart daily)

The risk of myopathy is also increased by the following lipid-lowering drugs that can cause myopathy when given alone:

- Gemfibrozil
- Other fibrates
- Niacin (nicotinic acid) (≥1 g/day)

The risk of muscle breakdown is increased with other drugs:

- Amiodarone
- Verapamil

Some patients taking lipid-lowering agents similar to ZOCOR and coumarin anticoagulants (a type of blood thinner) have experienced bleeding and/or increased blood clotting time. Patients taking these medicines should have their blood tested before starting therapy with ZOCOR and should continue to be monitored.

Central Nervous System Toxicity; Cancer, Mutations, Impairment of Fertility: Like most prescription drugs, ZOCOR was required to be tested on animals before it was marketed for human use. Often these tests were designed to achieve higher drug concentrations than humans achieve at recommended dosing. In some tests, the animals had damage to the nerves in the central nervous system. In studies of mice with high doses of ZOCOR, the likelihood of certain types of cancerous tumors increased. No evidence of mutations of or damage to genetic material has been seen. In 1 study with ZOCOR, there was decreased fertility in male rats.

Pregnancy: Pregnant women should not take ZOCOR because it may harm the fetus.

Safety in pregnancy has not been established. In studies with lipid-lowering agents similar to ZOCOR, there have been rare reports of birth defects of the skeleton and digestive system. Therefore, women of childbearing age should not take ZOCOR unless it is highly unlikely they will become pregnant. If a woman does become pregnant while taking ZOCOR, she should stop taking the drug and talk to her doctor at once. The active ingredient of ZOCOR did not cause birth defects in rats at 3 times the human dose or in rabbits at 3 times the human dose.

Nursing Mothers: Drugs taken by nursing mothers may be present in their breast milk. Because of the potential for serious adverse reactions in nursing infants, a woman taking ZOCOR should not breast-feed. (See WHEN ZOCOR SHOULD NOT BE USED.)

Pediatric Use: ZOCOR is not recommended for children or patients under 20 years of age.

Geriatric Use: Higher blood levels of active drug were seen in elderly patients (70–78 years of age) compared with younger patients (18–30 years of age) in 1 study. In other studies, the cholesterol-lowering effects of ZOCOR were at least as great in elderly patients as in younger patients, and there were no overall differences in safety between elderly and younger patients over the 20–80 mg/day dosage range.

SIDE EFFECTS

Most patients tolerate treatment with ZOCOR well; however, like all prescription drugs, ZOCOR can cause side effects, *and some of them can be serious.* Side effects that do occur are usually mild and short-lived. Only your doctor can weigh the risks versus the benefits of any prescription drug. In clinical studies with ZOCOR, less than 1.5% of patients dropped out of the studies because of side effects. In a large, long-term study, patients taking ZOCOR experienced similar side effects to those patients taking placebo (sugar pills). Some of the side effects that have been reported with ZOCOR or related drugs are listed below. This list is not complete. Be sure to ask your doctor about side effects before taking ZOCOR and to discuss any side effects that occur.

Digestive System: Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, gas, heartburn, stomach pain/cramps, anorexia, loss of appetite, nausea, inflammation of the pancreas, hepatitis, jaundice, fatty changes in the liver, and, rarely, severe liver damage and failure, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

Muscle, Skeletal: Muscle cramps, aches, pain, and weakness; joint pain; muscle breakdown.

Nervous System: Dizziness, headache, insomnia, tingling, memory loss, damage to nerves causing weakness and/or loss of sensation and/or abnormal sensations, anxiety, depression, tremor, loss of balance, psychic disturbances.

Skin: Rash, itching, hair loss, dryness, nodules, discoloration.

Eye/Senses: Blurred vision, altered taste sensation, progression of cataracts, eye muscle weakness.

Hypersensitivity (Allergic) Reactions: On rare occasions, a wide variety of symptoms have been reported to occur either alone or together in groups (referred to as a syndrome) that appeared to be based on allergic-type reactions, which may rarely be fatal. These have included 1 or more of the following: a severe generalized reaction that may include shortness of breath, wheezing, digestive symptoms, and low blood pressure and even shock; an allergic reaction with swelling of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat with difficulty swallowing or breathing; symptoms mimicking lupus (a disorder in which a person's immune system may attack parts of his or her own body); severe muscle and blood vessel inflammation, sometimes including rash; bruises; various disorders of blood cells (that could result in anemia, infection, or blood clotting problems) or abnormal blood tests; *inflamed or painful joints;* hives; *fatigue and* weakness; sensitivity to sunlight; fever, chills; flushing; difficulty breathing; and severe skin disorders that vary from rash to a serious burn-like shedding of skin all over the body, including mucous membranes such as the lining of the mouth.

Other: Loss of sexual desire, breast enlargement, impotence.

Laboratory Tests: Liver function test abnormalities including *elevated alkaline phosphatase and bilirubin;* thyroid function abnormalities.

NOTE: This summary provides important information about ZOCOR. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the prescribing information and then discuss it with them.

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CONFIDENCE ITSELF

Its bizarre evolution from a subjective emotional state to a leading economic indicator

SOCIETY

WALTER KIRN

According to popular textbook histories of the twentieth century's greatest national scandals, from the fixing of the 1919 World Series to the quiz-show fraud of the 1950s to Watergate, there are certain ritual stages of emotion that the American public passes through after discovering that it's been had. First comes shock—the so-called "loss of innocence," which, unlike a physical deflowering, is never so irrevocable that the same purity can't be spoiled again a decade or two later. Next comes a period of "national soul-searching," which for the literal-minded conjures up images of solid citizens abruptly dropping to their knees in prayer or falling silent at the supper table as their children barrage them with painful questions. Then on to the "widespread calls for reform" that break out spontaneously wherever there are crowds and rattle the tall towers of the elites, who immediately demand congressional hearings. And finally it arrives, the denouement, after the subpoenas and suspensions and blue-ribbon inquiries: "Confidence is restored."

In the past the target audience for these show-trial purges—these theatrical mass dark nights of the soul—was presumably America's children, because the likelihood was that anyone over twenty had already lived through one such solemn reckoning and had seen how ingeniously and swiftly fraud and chicanery regenerate themselves. And yet, according to the traditional wisdom, there was still real value in the exercise for the nation as a whole. The spectacle of disillusioned young folk ("Say it ain't so, Joe!") reminded the elders that they, too, were trusting once, and that it is good to trust and bad to break trust, and that we can, and must, and will, do better—if only to supply our children's children with their own share of trust and belief to be conned out of.

But how will the script read this time, if there is one? The occasion to revive that old morality play of disillusionment, panic, and despair that leads at last, painstakingly and gradually, to the re-establishment of good faith has come round again, and in spectacular fashion. The nation is soaked to the skin in fraud and fakery. It's standing waist-deep in a cistern of deceit under a drenching downpour of rigged ledgers, plagiarized best sellers, stolen gold medals, spoiled ballots, creepy-crawly priests, fictitious movie critics, padded résumés, insider stock trades by zillionaire faux homemakers, term papers downloaded off the Internet, journalists with nonexistent sources, fiber-optic lines that run from nowhere to nowhere, engineered energy shortages, intelligence agencies that don't return their operatives' urgent calls, investment gurus who don't buy what they sell, ex-Presidents posing as motivational speakers, and rubbery lumps of composite aquatic protein that far too many markets label "crab."

Loss of innocence may be highly unlikely at this late date, but the next step, national soul searching, would certainly seem to be in order. And yet it resolutely isn't happening—at least not on the scale one would expect. If, as the pop historians report, throwing a few games of the World Series and slipping a right answer now and then to especially attractive game-show contestants was enough to shake the nation's moral underpinnings, then shouldn't this vast, domed Roman amphitheater of billion-dollar scams and switcheroos and multi-stage, multi-year institutional ruses, not to mention the chronic routine cheating that fills in the gaps between the superhoaxes, be enough to rattle our self-assurance?

No, because our new vision of how things work—economies, sports teams, governments, corporations—and of what can cause them to cease to work doesn't permit self-indulgent negativity. Time was when strength, stability, and prosperity were thought to stem from the nation's moral worthiness, the soundness of its fundamental principles. But lately we've been taught, and many believe, that all good things come, at bottom, from proper attitudes—from our collective psychological posture toward events that we have scant control over, except in choosing how we'll respond to them.

The key is confidence—confidence itself. Dale Carnegie said so. The sports psychologists say so. Oprah Winfrey says so. And the U.S. government says so too, by placing its seal of approval on a statistic—the Consumer Confidence Index—that is issued monthly by something called The Conference Board, a prestigious panel of economists and industrialists founded back in 1916 as American industry's response to a spreading public skepticism about the basic integrity of big business.

From subjective emotional state to leading economic indicator—that's the magic The Conference Board has worked with human confidence. And it's not that the board members have developed some high-tech instrument for monitoring the pulses in consumers' neurons; no, they just ask people, 5,000 of them

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a month, how they're feeling. Do they want to buy something? The responses are tabulated, analyzed, and released with much fanfare to the financial establishment, which quickly turns them—by executing market decisions that by this stage represent feelings about feelings—into seemingly science-based self-fulfilling prophecies.

This can make for a gigantic spiral of self-delusion if the reason consumers are feeling optimistic is that they've been lied to about their own condition—lied to about the health of their investments, or pumped up about the prospects of their employer. But is that such a bad thing if it breeds confidence? Indeed, logic suggests that a little self-delusion is probably a good thing in such a system, and maybe even a necessary thing. According to the alchemy of confidence, soft perceptions can, in time, be leveraged into solid economic realities. *Think and Grow Rich*—it isn't just the title of a perennial best-selling self-help paperback; its premise is the soul of the American machine that created the nineties trompe l'oeil golden age and might still be able to produce a silver one.

Knowing this, is it really any wonder that some of the folks who've been running the machine fudged a third-quarter EBITDA here and there in an attempt to spread that rosy feeling? Or that they paid for acquisitions that weren't worth the price by technical measures but might, through some ego boost brought on by feeling so wildly desired, eventually close the valuation gap by dint of sheer American zoom and zip?

Yes, kids, you can cheat your way to legitimacy—like the *Washington Post* reporter who wrote a book and bought truckloads of copies to push it onto best-seller lists. Or like the historians who lift from others' books, perhaps reasoning that when their books hit it big, the other books (not hits) would quickly be forgotten and the carping of jealous nobodies wouldn't stick. Confidence plus some cash (or a good credit line, or a few borrowed chapters, or an Internet concept) equals cash abundant and status squared. That's the latest theory, at least, and though, like socialism, it hasn't yet worked perfectly in practice, and in fact has caused several major disasters, who wants to be the first to abandon it—to desert the bright "yes" team for the gloomy soul-searchers and possibly set off (who knows?) the next depression?

That loss-of-faith and hitting-bottom ritual just doesn't pay the way it used to, we fear. Though we also fear—from way, way back in our moralistic, Old Testament brain stems—that tolerating fakery can have costs. So here we stand, wised up but not depressed, feeling abused but not ready to cut and run, paralyzed by a cost-benefit analysis that, if we're able to be honest with ourselves, we secretly hope will finally be dealt with for us by events—events that we'd rather not contemplate just now.

Walter Kirn is the author of Up in the Air *(2001), and is at work on his second novel.*

THE INFORMATION WARS

Terrorism has become a pretext for a new culture of secrecy

REGULATION

MARY GRAHAM

Within twenty-four hours of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center the federal Department of Transportation had removed maps of the nation's 2.2 million miles of pipe lines from its Web site. The government had created the maps only recently, to identify places where ruptures in pipes that carry oil, natural gas, or hazardous chemicals could endanger lives, property, or drinking water. In the 1990s an average of four accidents a week caused property damage of more than $50,000, injury, or death.

The removal of the maps was hardly an isolated incident. Since September federal and state officials have stricken from Web sites and public reports thousands of pages of information about health and safety risks to Americans—information, officials say, that might somehow aid terrorists. The Environmental Protection Agency withdrew from its Web site information about accidents, risks, and emergency plans at factories that handle dangerous chemicals. Energy regulators removed reports on power plants, transmission lines, and the transportation of radioactive materials. The Federal Aviation Administration stopped posting enforcement information about security breaches at airports and incidents that threatened airline safety. The U.S. Geological Survey removed reports on water resources and asked libraries to destroy all copies of a CD-ROM that described the characteristics of reservoirs.

Some state governments went further. Florida not only restricted access to security plans for hospitals and state facilities but also gave the president of the state senate authority to close formerly public meetings. In a directive that was itself intended to be secret, New York State's directors of public security and state operations ordered agency heads to curb public access to all "sensitive information." What, exactly, was "sensitive"? "Information related to systems, structures, individuals and services essential to the security, government or economy of the State, including telecommunications ... electrical power, gas and oil storage and transportation, banking and finance, transportation, water supply, emergency services ... and the conti-

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nuity of government operations." Just about everything, that is.

These were extraordinary measures for extraordinary times. Administration officials moved quickly and appropriately to remove from the Web maps of nuclear-power plants and defense installations, for example. The Web, they argued, transformed previously scattered information into mosaics of opportunity for extremists. But a year after the terrorist attacks temporary emergency actions have evolved into fundamental changes in the public's right to know, and the restrictions have been driven as much by familiar politics and bureaucratic instincts as by national security. The problem comes because a new and uncertain threat has provided cover for legitimate and opportunistic measures alike.

Even before September 11 the Bush Administration had taken unprecedented steps to expand official secrecy. Early last year Vice President Dick Cheney refused to provide to Congress the names of energy-industry executives who had advised the energy-policy task force he headed. That action provoked the first lawsuit ever by the General Accounting Office against the executive branch. Also before September 11 the Justice Department initiated work on a new policy to support agency actions to keep secret *any* government information, as long as agency heads had a "sound legal basis" for withholding it. This reversed a presumption in favor of disclosure unless the government could show "foreseeable harm."

By October, President Bush was calling for new policies to shield information voluntarily provided by private companies about weaknesses in "critical infrastructure"—a malleable term that the Administration said should include telecommunications, energy, financial services, transportation, and health care. In March, Andrew Card, the White House chief of staff, ordered all agencies to adopt guidelines to prevent inappropriate disclosure of "sensitive but unclassified" information—without actually defining the term.

Typically, these new rules have been put into effect by memorandum, without public explanation. Missing has been any forum for weighing the risks of shutting off public access. Recent congressional debate about restricting access to critical infrastructure information under the Freedom of Information Act provided one limited step in the right direction, producing constructive ideas about how to narrow the definition of what is critical while still satisfying the concerns of national-security agencies.

Zealous secrecy in response to a foreign threat is not new, of course. In a Harvard commencement address this past June, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan reminded students that the Cold War had produced a culture of secrecy that outlived the conflict and at times actually impaired security. That culture had largely disappeared by the end of the 1990s, as a better-informed public and the growth of the Internet drove advances toward openness. The Clinton Administration declassified millions of pages of historical records, and Congress approved the Electronic Freedom of Information Act, which encouraged agencies to put information online even before it was requested.

The wholesale censorship of information on Web sites and in government reports carries insidious costs. Current government proposals to bar foreign nationals from working on scientific projects and to restrict publication of government-funded research could actually decrease national security. Relying on partial truths and official conclusions can create needless scares, increase risks, and ultimately change the political process.

Compromises that deem some members of the public more worthy than others violate basic fairness. The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, long known for its openness, now requires researchers to register before it gives them direct access to its enormous Envirofacts database. It also requires them to obtain sponsorship from a senior official and have their requests approved in advance. "The danger is that right to know is replaced by need to know," says Gary D. Bass, the director of OMB Watch and the organizer of a new coalition of environmental, health, labor, journalist, and library groups tracking secrecy changes.

An administration that prides itself on conducting business like a well-run corporation naturally thinks that sensitive information can and should remain proprietary. But national security is everyone's concern, and the idea that openness can be more effective than secrecy in reducing risks has received too little attention.

Mary Graham's book Democracy by Disclosure: The Rise of Technopopulism *will be published this month.*

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BUCKING THE HERD

Parents who refuse vaccination for their children may be putting entire communities at risk

HEALTH

ARTHUR ALLEN

Boulder, Colorado, a university town of 96,000, lies in a sequestered valley on the western edge of the Great Plains. Both geographically and culturally it is a place apart. Ralph Nader won more than 10 percent of Boulder's vote in the most recent presidential election. Natural-food groceries outnumber Safeways; chiropractors' offices line the main drag; and the city council recently declared that dog owners would henceforth be referred to as "dog guardians." A popular bumper sticker reads, WELCOME TO BOULDER, 20 SQUARE MILES SURROUNDED BY REALITY. Boulder is, in short, an experiment-oriented city.

A particularly interesting experiment, from a public-health perspective, has taken shape at the Shining Mountain Waldorf School, a campus of one-story wooden buildings set amid cottonwood and willow trees hard by the foothills of the Rockies. By their parents' choosing, nearly half of the 292 students at Shining Mountain have received only a few, and in some cases none, of the twenty-one childhood vaccinations mandated by Colorado state law in accordance with federal guidelines. The shunning of one of the vaccines, against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis, has resulted in a revival of whooping cough, the illness that occurs when colonies of the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis* attach to the lining of the upper respiratory passages, releasing toxins that cause inflammation and a spasmodic cough. The high-pitched whoop is a symptom heard mainly in younger children; it's the sound of a desperate attempt to breathe.

Shining Mountain exemplifies a growing movement in American life: the challenge to childhood vaccination. According to a survey published in the November 2000 issue of *Pediatrics*, one fourth of all parents are skeptical of some or all of the standard vaccines. Some states grant exemptions to the law so that parents can refuse vaccinations for their children. In Colorado parents who don't want their children vaccinated have only to sign a card stating as much. In Oregon the rate of religious exemptions—which are granted to all parents who choose not to have their children immunized for philosophical reasons—tripled, from 0.9 percent in the 1996–1997 school year to 2.7 percent in 2001.

Those skeptical of vaccines have various reasons. Some believe that vaccines are responsible for otherwise unexplained increases in conditions such as autism, asthma, and multiple sclerosis. Others, including the conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, see government attempts to track and enforce immunization as an intrusion on privacy. Still others—parents whose recollections of their own bouts of chickenpox or measles are bathed in nostalgia—argue that the elimination of traditional childhood illnesses is an attack on childhood itself. The parents at Shining Mountain are influenced by the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, a turn-of-the-century Austrian philosopher who founded the Waldorf movement. Steiner (who was not a medical doctor) believed that children's spirits benefited from being tempered in the fires of a good inflammation.

The critics have concluded that the dangers of vaccination outweigh the risks of vaccine-preventable disease. Like all medical interventions, vaccination entails some risk, although the extent and gravity of potential side effects are matters of debate. For example, febrile seizures occur in roughly one in 10,000 children—perhaps 1,000 a year in the United States—who receive the current whooping-cough vaccine. Such seizures rarely, if ever, lead to permanent brain damage, however, and in any case febrile seizures are triggered just as easily by a run-of-the-mill infection as by a vaccine. Suspicions that mercury preservatives used in vaccines inflicted neurological damage on children are worrisome but unproved (mercury has largely been phased out of vaccines over the past three years).

To some extent vaccination is a victim of its own success. Owing to vaccination campaigns, smallpox no longer exists in man, and polio has been driven from the Western Hemisphere. Measles, diphtheria, and invasive hemophilus bacterial disease (such as meningitis) are rare in the United States, and even whooping cough is unusual enough that few parents consider it a threat. All these diseases, with the exception of smallpox, still infest various corners of the world, but in most of the United States even those who have not been vaccinated against them, or in whom the vaccine is not effective, are protected, because most of the people we meet have been vaccinated. Epidemiologists call this phenomenon "herd immunity": the more vaccinated sheep there are, the safer an unvaccinated one is. When vaccination rates drop, disease returns.

Precisely at what point herd immunity fails is difficult to calculate, but there is ample evidence that it does. Since the collapse of the Soviet public-health system diphtheria has returned to Russia with a vengeance, killing thousands. Sweden suspended vaccination against whooping cough from 1979 to 1996 while testing a new vaccine. In a study of the moratorium period that was published in 1993, Swedish physicians found that 60 percent of the country's children got whooping cough before they were ten. However, close medical monitoring kept the death rate from whooping cough at about one per year during that period.

Boulder, which has the lowest schoolwide vaccination rate in Colorado, has one of the highest per capita rates of whooping cough in the United States. The problem started in 1993, when fifty-two people in Boulder

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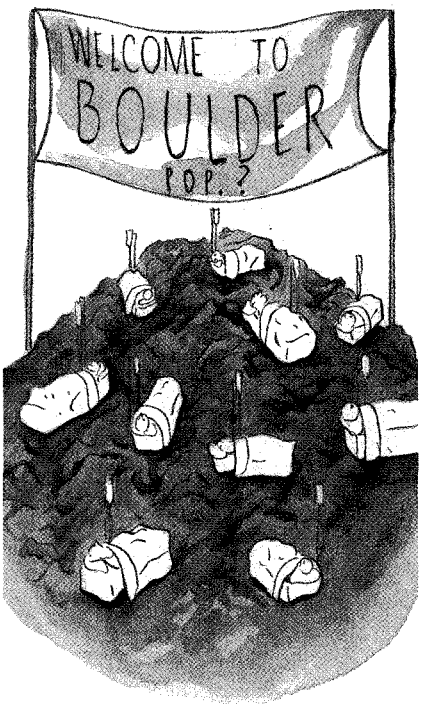
County contracted the disease. Since then the county has seen an average of eighty-one cases a year. Although unvaccinated children are six times as likely as vaccinated children to get whooping cough during an outbreak, about half the cases in Colorado have involved vaccinated children; the whooping-cough vaccine sometimes fails to produce effective immunity, and even successful pertussis immunity generally wanes by age ten. "At first we called it an outbreak; then we started calling it a sustained outbreak; now we just say it's endemic," Ann Marie Bailey, the county nurse epidemiologist when I visited Boulder last year, told me.

To many in Boulder, endemic pertussis is no cause for alarm. Shining Mountain's director, Robert Schiappacasse, says that his daughter, who had been immunized, got whooping cough but suffered no lasting effects. He became a little concerned, he told me, when the baby of one of the school's secretaries "coughed himself into a hernia" after visiting the school during an outbreak. Still, "parents here," Schiappacasse said, apparently including himself in the category, "are more likely to be worried about fumes from a new carpet than they are about any infectious disease."

I also spoke with Johnnie Egars, a Shining Mountain parent whose three children, all unvaccinated, got whooping cough in 1994. Her youngest child was particularly sick. Egars's description of the experience was harrowing. "It was a loud cough that went down to her toes, and the whoop was a sharp intake of breath," she recalled. "She coughed and coughed until she threw up; then she slept an hour or two. Then she'd wake up and start over again." The daughter, who was two at the time, was undergoing treatment for cancer; she was hospitalized for three days in the infectious-diseases ward of Children's Hospital in Denver. Nonetheless, Egars is comfortable with her decision not to vaccinate her children. A niece was hospitalized with febrile seizures following a pertussis vaccination, and in her view, "immunization just weakens the immune system." She adds, "We have a history of cancer in my family, so we try to do everything we can to strengthen the immune system."

From its reservoir in the undervaccinated population of Boulder pertussis



has branched out: neighboring Jefferson and Denver Counties had more cases in 2000 than Boulder did. Some of the people who live near Boulder are angry. "There is a constant presence of whooping cough here, and it's because of Boulder Valley," says Kathy Keffeler, the chief school nurse for Longmont, a growing city just north of Boulder.

Pertussis is on the rise not just in Colorado but across the country: there were 7,600 cases last year, as compared with 4,600 in 1994. It can be fatal, especially in countries—like ours—with spotty health-care coverage. In 2000 it killed seventeen people in the United States, including two Colorado babies, both of whom were taken to the hospital too late. "It was very sad," Tina Albertson, a pediatric resident who cared for one of the infants, told me. "She was a six-week-old girl with a sister and a brother, four and six. The family had chosen not to immunize, and the week she was born, her siblings both had whooping cough. When they're real little, the babies don't whoop—they just stop breathing. This little girl was septic by the time they got her here."

Like most in Boulder, Ann Marie Bailey, the nurse epidemiologist, is tolerant of the alternative health-care scene; she cedes nonvaccinating parents the right to decide what's best for their children. But she gently points out that they're fooling themselves if they think no one else is affected by their decisions. "We've been able to show very definitely that whooping cough spreads from these pockets in small communities. If they lived in a vacuum at Shining Mountain—if they never went out to go swimming or to church or the YMCA or the Boy Scouts—it would be a different ball game," she told me.

Jia Gottlieb, a family practitioner who offers acupuncture and breathing exercises along with traditional medicine, said, "When I get parents who don't vaccinate, I tell them, 'When your boy gets a vaccination he takes on a risk for the public good, just like the firemen [at the World Trade Center] who went back into the buildings.'" But Gottlieb's words usually fall on deaf ears. "These are probably people who donate a lot of money to good causes," he said, "but their view is 'I'm going to let everyone else's child take a risk but not my own.' That's not avant-garde. That's not enlightened. It's pretty primitive. And ironically, in a town like Boulder the selfish strategy is probably not in the best interests of your child either." A

Arthur Allen lives in Washington, D.C., and is at work on a history of vaccination.

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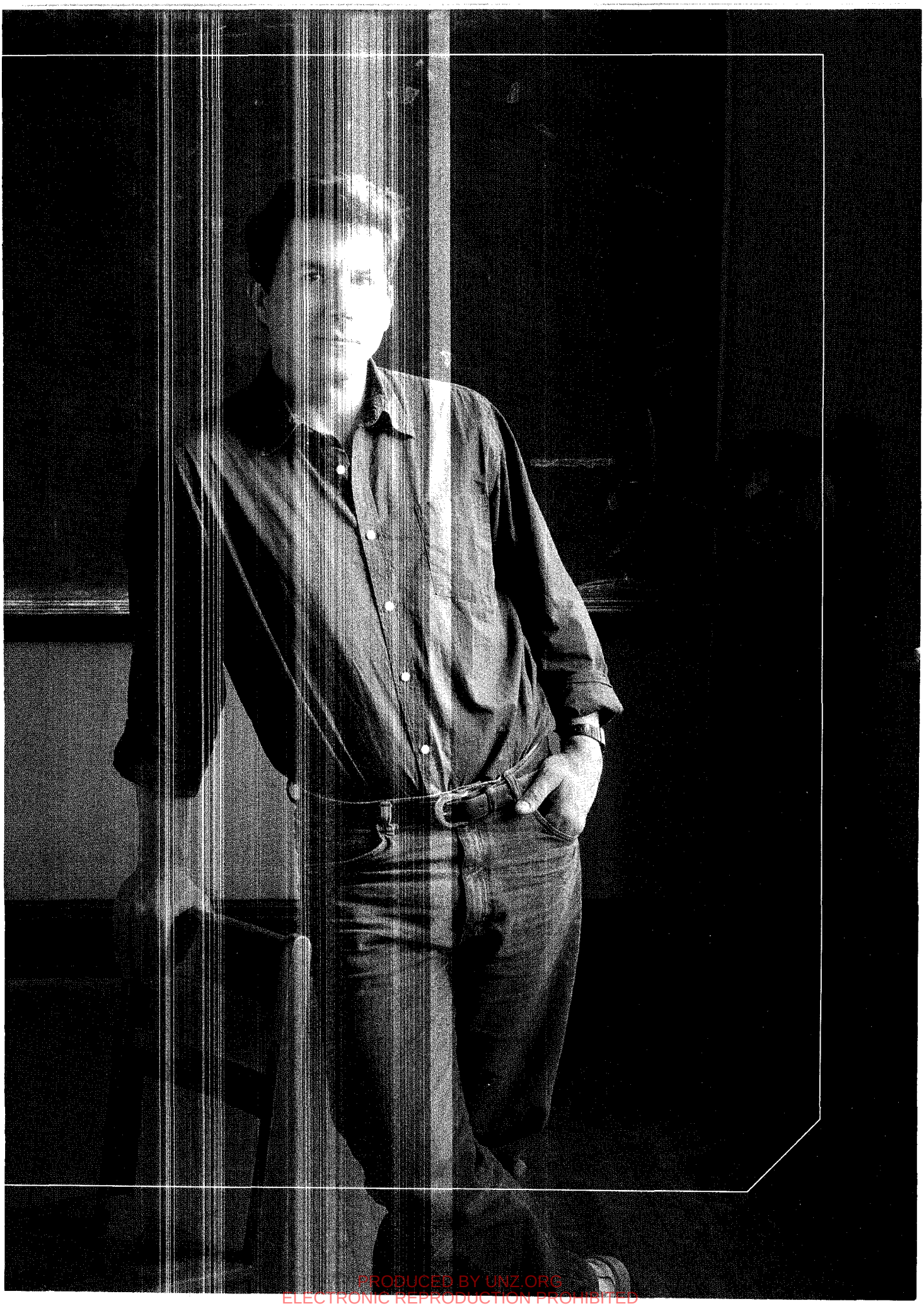

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AMERICAN GROUND:
Unbuilding the World Trade Center

PART TWO
THE RUSH TO RECOVER

After nine months of unrivaled access to the disaster site, our correspondent tells the inside story of the recovery effort. This is the second installment in a three-part series

BY WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

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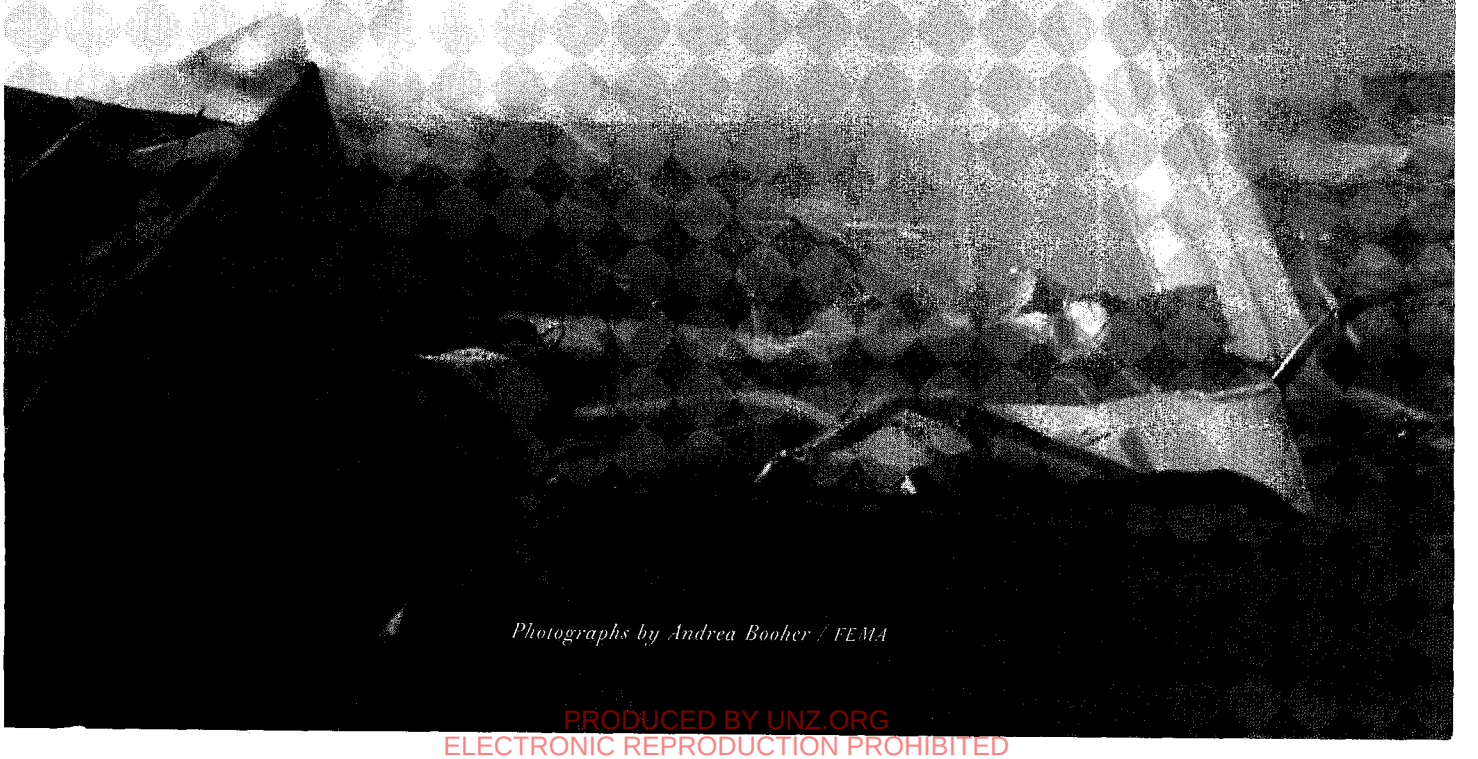
The dread that Americans felt during the weeks following the September 11 attacks stemmed less from the fear of death than from a collective loss of control—a sense of being dragged headlong into an apocalyptic future for which society seemed unprepared.



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That future was delivered at a precise place and time—inside American Airlines Flight 11, a twin-aisle Boeing 767 that had departed Boston and was westbound for Los Angeles at 29,000 feet, near Albany, New York. This was the airplane that would hit the World Trade Center's North Tower. Both pilots were at their accustomed positions in the cockpit. At 8:13:29 the en route air-traffic controller at Boston Center said, "American 11, turn twenty degrees right." One of the pilots answered, "Twenty right, American 11." It was the flight's last routine transmission. Sixteen seconds later the controller issued instructions for a climb, and received no response, presumably because in that brief interval the hijackers had burst into the cockpit and with brutal efficiency had assumed command.

The controller did not suspect it at the time. Indeed, neither he nor others on the ground could have guessed that anything about the morning was extraordinary. In New York City, Sam Melisi, the fireman who would play an unexpected diplomatic role in the recovery effort over the following months, was sitting in the familiar engine room of the fireboat where he worked, studying for a ship's engineer exam that he was scheduled to take at the end of the week. Kenneth Holden, the youngish commissioner of the city's Department of Design and Construction, was in his Queens office preparing to leave for a regular meeting in Lower Manhattan, at City Hall. His lieutenant, Michael Burton, was headed to the same meeting, and was weaving impatiently as usual through traffic on the drive from his house in suburban Westchester County. At the same time, tens of thousands of office workers were streaming from the subways and commuter trains, and grabbing their customary coffees, or riding the elevators straight up to their offices in the World Trade Center towers. Workers all through the city were doing similar things. There were perhaps 18 million people in the vicinity of New York that morning, and later it seemed every one had a story that started with a routine.

The routine held at Boston Center for eleven long minutes after the hijacking began. The weather was known to be bright, smooth, and clear. Air traffic was light. For the controller who had lost radio contact with American 11 there really wasn't much to do. The airplane tracked steadily westward across the radar screen. The controller assumed that its continuing silence amounted to a simple communication failure—a relatively common occurrence—and he tried to re-establish radio contact, but without undue concern. He mentioned the problem to another controller, in charge of the adjoining airspace, and he continued to work the other flights in his piece of the New England sky—a Continental, a couple of Deltas, and two business jets that cruised by.

Then came the next step in the sequence of what would become a strange aerial ballet: at 8:23 the second 767 destined to hit the Trade Center came flying into the controller's sector and as expected checked onto the frequency. It was United Flight 175, running fifteen minutes behind American 11, and also bound from Boston to Los Angeles. This was the airplane that would soon flow in a stream of molten aluminum down the South Tower's side, but of course there was no hint of that now. The pilot sounded particularly relaxed. He said, "Boston, morning. United 175 out of 19 for 2-3-0."

With a confirming glance at the altitude readout on the radar screen, the controller said, "United 175, Boston, ah, Center, roger." The frequency was silent for nearly a minute and a half. Then the controller heard something in his headset, possibly just the hollowness of an empty "carrier" signal—a raw transmission without the modulation of spoken words. He radioed, "Is that American 11 trying to call?"

This time there was a voice, heavily accented. On the public air-traffic-control frequency, for all who were tuned in to hear, it said, "We have some planes. Just stay quiet, and you'll be okay. We are returning to the airport."

Little is known about the scene in American 11's cockpit at that point. No "black box" recorder survived in the Trade Center's ruins. It is possible, as was reported afterward, that one of the pilots had surreptitiously keyed his microphone to pick up the threats and warn air-traffic control. More likely, however, the pilots were already dead or disabled, and one of the hijackers had strapped himself into the seat behind the controls and was misusing an audio selection switch, unintentionally transmitting a message meant only for the cabin's public-address system.

It had been fourteen years since the last airline hijacking in the United States. Understandably, the controller was taken aback. He radioed, "And, uh, who's trying to call me here?"

Silence.

He radioed, "American 11, are you trying to call?"

Again the hijacker was heard. He said, "Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet."

The controller was quick enough not to radio him again. He notified his superiors that a hijacking was in progress. The United pilots must have understood this too. Like the other crews on the frequency, they maintained radio discipline. Not a word of comment went out over the air. Two minutes later the controller handed off the United flight to another sector within Boston Center's airspace.

It was 8:28. American 11's transponder beacon had been switched off, degrading its display on the radar screens and extinguishing its altitude readout. As an unenhanced "primary" blip, it turned sharply and began to move at high speed down the Hudson Valley toward metropolitan New York. As it busted through the various sectors and into the airspace belonging to New York Center, the Boston controllers continued to monitor the frequency—now cleared of other traffic. The flight downriver lasted eighteen minutes. A third of the way

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through it the frequency came alive with another unintentional transmission: "Nobody move, please. We are going back to the airport. Don't try to make any stupid moves." It sounded almost polite. People took the words at face value. The destination appeared to be New York. Newark and Kennedy Airports prepared for a landing.

Then United 175 got involved again. The pilots had checked onto a new Boston Center frequency, and were level at 31,000 feet, when the hijacked airplane flew nearby. The controller wanted to verify its altitude, and he asked United 175 for help. He said, "Do you have traffic? Look at, ah, your twelve to one o'clock position at about, uh, ten miles southbound, to see if you can see an American 767 out there, please."

Having heard the transmissions on the previous frequency, the United pilots must have known what this was about, but again they maintained the expected calm. The view from their cockpit was superb. Looking downsun, they spotted the airplane ahead and several thousand feet below, crossing fast from right to left. "Affirmative. We have him, ah, he looks, ah, about 20, yeah, about 29, 28,000."

Reflexively the controller directed them into the airspace above and behind American 11's tail. He said, "United 175, turn five ... turn thirty degrees right. I want to keep you away from this traffic." The encounter was later reported as a near collision between the two airliners—a gross if typical exaggeration. Ultimately, of course, the turn did neither airplane any good.

The scene inside American 11 was very rough. There were five hijackers aboard, Islamic militants armed with box cutters and small blades. They were led by an Egyptian named Mohammed Atta, the chief conspirator behind all four of the attacks that day. The cabin of American 11 was less than half full, with seventy-six hapless passengers and nine flight attendants. One of the flight attendants, a forty-five-year-old woman named Betty Ong, dialed a seatback flight phone and reached a reservation agent on the ground. In terrified tones, gasping for air, Ong reported the hijacking. The agent passed her to a supervisor, who patched her through to American Airlines' national operations center, in Fort Worth, Texas. The manager on duty there, an airline veteran named Craig Marquis, pulled up her records and, concerned that the call might be a hoax, asked for her employee number and nickname. This she managed to give him. She said that two of the flight attendants had been stabbed, one so severely that she was on oxygen, and that a business-class passenger had been killed by having his throat cut. She counted four of the hijackers, and reported their seat numbers. She said they had used a chemical spray that burned her eyes and made breathing difficult. Marquis could do nothing but keep her company. He asked Ong if there was a doctor on board. "No, no doctor," she said. As the airplane approached New York, he asked her if it was descending. She said, "We're starting to descend! We're starting to descend!" By then she may have felt more hope than horror. It was natural to assume that they were descending to land.

Apparently Ong could not see into the cockpit, which was just as well if the pilots inside it had been killed. Mohammed Atta was at the controls. Descending along the Hudson River, he pushed American 11 to over 500 mph, nearly twice the normal low-altitude speed, and hardly what you would expect from a 767 setting up for a landing. Still, no one yet guessed his purpose. At 8:40 he was six minutes out from the North Tower.

The pilots of United 175 had lost sight of him in the vastness behind their left wing. They checked onto a new frequency, now in New York Center's jurisdiction, with an abbreviated call: "United 175, at Flight Level 310."

The controller answered, "United 175, roger," but his mind, too, was on the airspace behind them. He radioed to another crew who had been asked, like the United pilots, to spot American 11 to estimate its altitude. "USAir 583, do a favor. Were you asked to look for an aircraft, an American flight about eight or nine o'clock, ten miles, southbound, last altitude 2-9-0? No one is sure where he is."

USAir answered, "Yeah, we talked about him on the last frequency. We spotted him when he was at our three o'clock position. He did appear to us to be at 29,000 feet. We're not picking him up on TCAS."

The controller said, "No. It looks like they shut off their transponder. That's why the question about it." This was by then so obviously an inadequate explanation that the controller seemed to be talking in code—signaling that something very serious was occurring here. The frequency was quiet for a full minute, during which the United pilots apparently decided to drop any pretense that the problem was a communication failure only. Even so, when they radioed again their expression was tightly controlled. "New York, United 175 Heavy."

"United 175, go ahead."

"We figured we'd wait to go to your center. We heard a suspicious transmission on our departure from Boston.

At 8:13:29 the en route air-traffic controller at Boston Center said, "American 11, turn twenty degrees right." One of the pilots answered, "Twenty right, American 11." Sixteen seconds later the controller issued instructions for a climb—and received no response.

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Sounds like someone keyed the mike and said, 'Everyone stay in your seats.'" He was referring, of course, to American 11's unintentional transmissions.

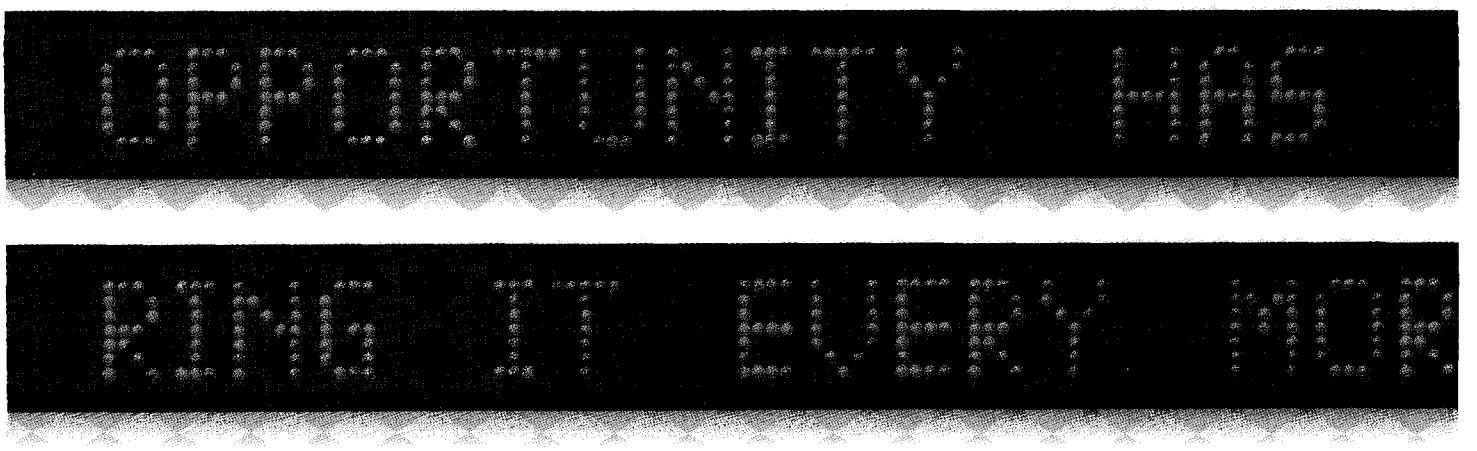
The controller said, "Okay, I'll pass that along."

The pilot said, "It cut out."

That was United 175's final call. The time was 8:42. Just afterward a team led by a twenty-three-year-old citizen of the United Arab Emirates named Marwan al-Shehhi invaded the cockpit. The attack was so sudden that the pilots had no chance to alert the world. Nonetheless these 767s were big things with hidden spaces and lots of telephones, and word quickly got out: a mechanic on duty at United's San Francisco center for in-flight complaints got a call from a flight attendant on board who, before the line went dead, blurted, "Oh, my God! The crew's been killed, and a flight attendant has been stabbed! We've been hijacked!" The airplane held five hijackers, two dead pilots, seven flight attendants, and fifty-one passengers. United 175 turned and dove toward New York.

At about the same time, American 11 passed low over the George Washington Bridge. As best the last moments inside the cabin can be reconstructed, few passengers if any were looking through the windows, or were aware of the airplane's ominous flight profile—the combination of ultra low altitude and high speed that characterized its final bombing run. The mood aboard must have been fearful but quieter now. In the back of the airplane another flight attendant was on the phone. Her name was Madeline Amy Sweeney. She had gotten through to an American flight-service manager in Boston, and with exceptional cool had given him a running account of the hijacking, fingering the terrorists and confirming much of Betty Ong's account, including the slaughter of the passenger in business class. It is likely that she added important details about the terrorists' techniques—how, for instance, they got into the cockpit—which for security reasons have not been made public. Seconds before 8:46 and the impact she looked through a window to give a position report, and to her surprise saw the city flashing by. She said, "I see water and buildings!" She may have been the first person to understand the hijackers' intentions. She said, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

Across the East River, in an industrial section of Queens, in a converted Chiclets factory now used as the headquarters of the city's Department of Design and Construction, Commissioner Ken Holden had been delayed by the usual round of morning telephone calls. At age forty-four, Holden was an observant, quick-eyed man of medium height, with close-cropped curly hair and a body gone wide after fifteen years of government service. As a registered (if



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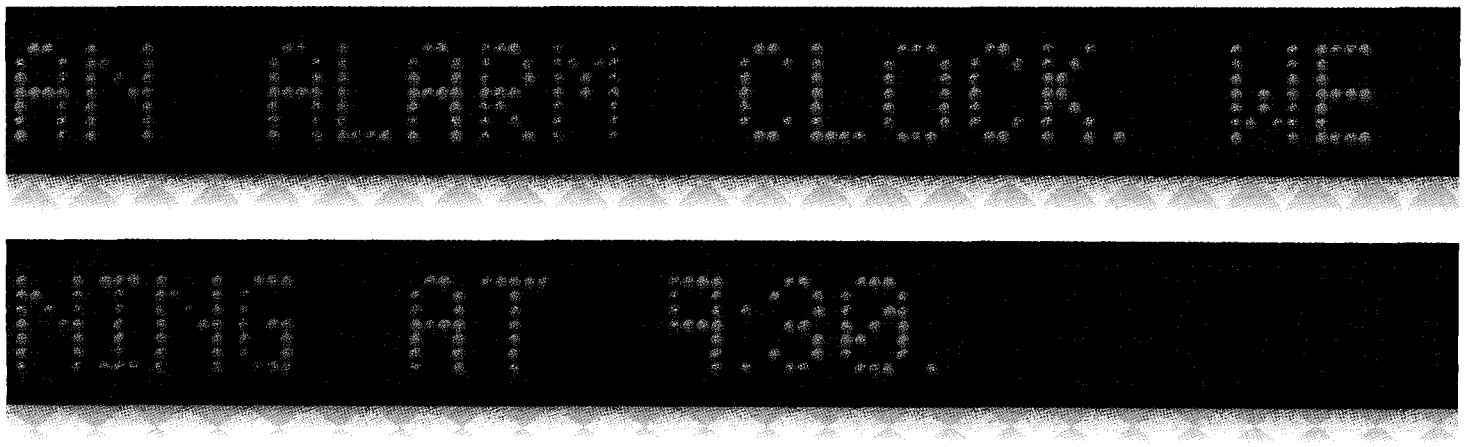
ambivalent) Democrat in Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's Republican administration, he was not a political operative in the conventional sense but a professional bureaucrat selected for command because of his willingness to stay in the shadows and accomplish routine but essential work; he was also known to be very smart. His intelligence gave him a presence, but not always to his benefit. He had an acerbic wit that he tried to restrain when around duller minds. The restraint required effort on his part. He was by nature amazingly verbose. He had a way of cutting short his sentences by saying "and whatnot," only to go on immediately to the next thought. Among his subordinates he had a reputation as a decisive and impatient manager with a strong instinct for self-preservation. Often he reveled in his job, and sometimes he did not. He had a badge and an official car with a driver. He could be arrogant at times, especially with people like low-ranking cops who got in his way or slowed him down. But with his inner circle he was unpretentious. He made a comfortable middle-class living, near the top of the city's pay scale, but as an appointee in an administration nearing its end, he worried openly about what would come next. He was not a construction man, and had few ties to the industry. He lived in a modest house in Queens with his wife, Frances McGuire, an artist, and their young son, Teddy, named after the first Roosevelt. Holden loved his family. He liked to read. He drove a Subaru station wagon. He liked to hike and cross-country ski. He liked his weekends off.

The agency he ran, the DDC, was practically unknown even within the city government. It had been created in 1996 by the Giuliani administration to oversee the generally thankless work of building and repairing the municipal infrastructure—sewers, sidewalks, station houses, and other whatnots that on the scale of New York City added up to a lot. Typically the DDC had about 800 projects under way, most of them very small. With its 1,300 employees and a $3.7 billion design and construction budget, it was a sizable organization, but it lacked the natural political clout of the uniformed services—fire and police—or the prestige of the city's small but highly visible Office of Emergency Management. Giuliani was widely thought to favor all the law-and-order types, because of his background as a prosecutor. This may also simply have been a trait of his personality. He had a reputation for being dictatorial and vindictive. His detractors called him a terror. His admirers said he ran a tight ship. Either way, Holden had learned not to expect friendship from him, and to fear his attention rather than to court it. He had also learned to be on time. The mayor was not expected to attend this morning's 9:15 meeting at City Hall, but his loyalist deputy Tony Coles was standing in for him, and Holden did not want to be late.



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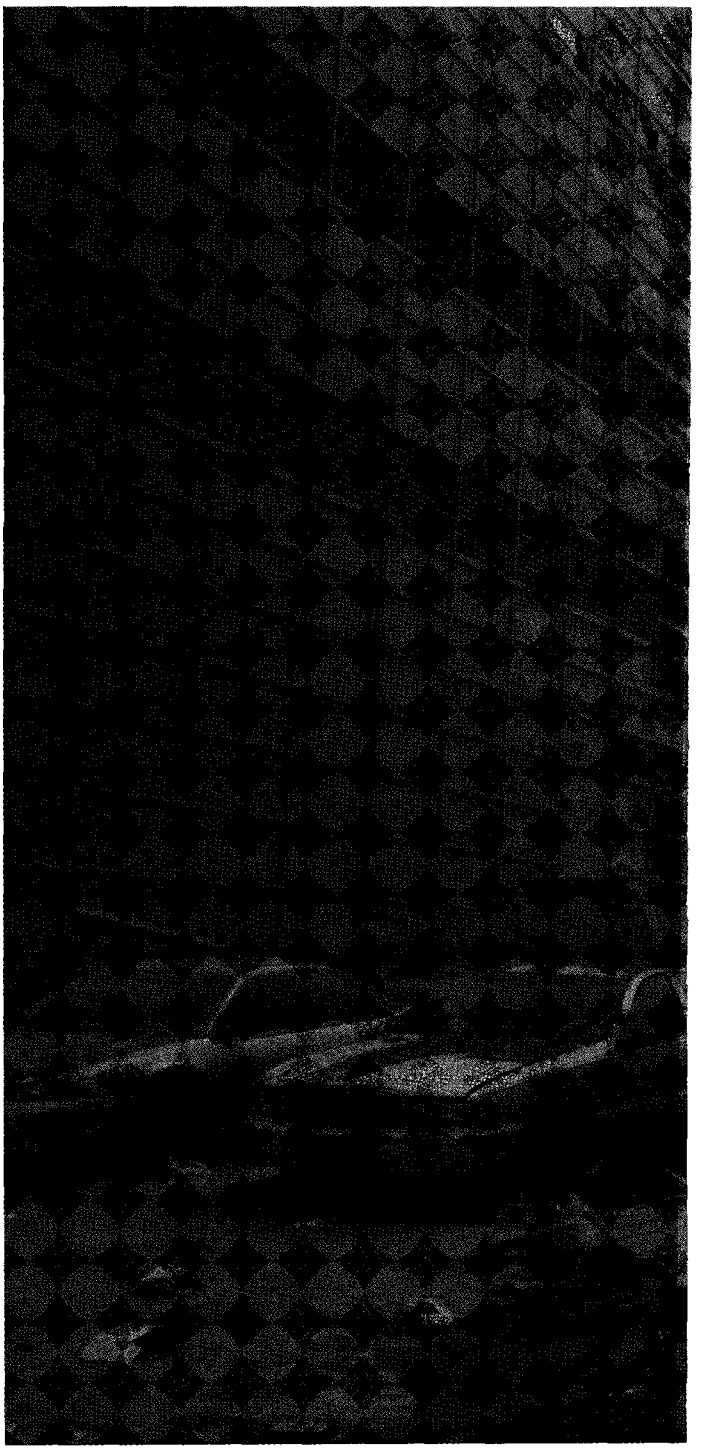
Holden tended to sweat when he moved fast. He was heading down the stairs in the atrium of the DDC headquarters, when one of his staff members came up to him and reported that an airplane had just hit the World Trade Center. Holden hurried outside to where his official car waited, and in the distance he saw the North Tower burning. One rush then turned into another, and endured.

Were it not for the scheduled meeting downtown, neither Holden nor his ambitious thirty-nine-year-old lieutenant, Mike Burton—the Trade Center site's future "czar"—would have had any reason to get involved in the recovery from the disaster. The DDC was not meant to respond to emergencies. But despite the morning's confusion, the discipline of the schedule prevailed, and without giving much thought to why, each man headed independently toward City Hall—indeed, more intently than before. Actually, Burton was already almost there. He had been coming down the FDR Drive in his Jeep at the time of the first airplane's impact, had noticed the ambulances going by, and had turned on the radio to find out why. After getting stuck in traffic by the Brooklyn Bridge, he pulled to the side, and proceeded through the city on foot. Holden had farther to go, but in a fast sedan with rights to the emergency lanes—a police-package Ford Crown Victoria with a special permit in the front window and a siren and flashing lights. The driver was a short, muscular Dominican named Apollo Hernandez, a bodybuilder who flew small airplanes in his spare time and had a penchant for speed. He was completely dedicated to Holden, whom he referred to as "the Commissioner."

Despite that formality, in the car they had established some of the patterns of a couple. Holden liked to sit in the front and give Hernandez driving advice. Today, for once, it did not involve slowing down. As they raced through Queens, they listened to the news radio station WINS, whose tag line was "You give us twenty-two minutes, and we'll give you the world." They lost reception briefly while passing under the East River in the Midtown Tunnel. When the station returned, in Manhattan, the world it gave them was news that a second airplane had come in, and that it had hit the South Tower. The implications were huge. Hernandez launched into an earnest explanation of the fuel capacity of small airplanes. Holden for once was almost silent. Though he had been raised in an observant Jewish family, and as a young man had given faith a serious try for a few months while living in Israel, he had become a thoroughly unreligious person—and also enthusiastically profane. True to himself now, he did not invoke the name of God, as so many others did on both sides that day, but reacted to the magnitude of the event by thinking *Holy shit!* as the car sped downtown.

They parked beside City Hall, about four blocks from the burning towers. Holden jumped out and said, "Wait here. Don't move. Wait here. I'll come back." Those words haunted him later, after the buildings fell. In the uncertainty of the moment he couldn't help but worry that Hernandez might have



followed his orders too faithfully and died. Meanwhile, City Hall was locked tight. Holden gave up on the idea of a meeting, and stood idly outside. Burton had given up on it too, and had boarded a mobile command post—a bus belonging to the Office of Emergency Management—that was creeping west toward the Trade Center fires. Then the South Tower fell. Holden heard it as a growl, Burton as a roar. Both men were caught in the debris cloud, and each moved north among the crowds. When the North Tower fell, Burton was caught in that cloud, too, and Holden was not. Because neither of them was injured, it amounted to a minor difference. Essentially they

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experienced the same dreamy confusions that were shared by a hundred thousand others in downtown Manhattan.

After a few hours Holden found a functioning phone and first called DDC headquarters, and then called his wife. Later I asked him how she had been. He said, "Upset."

I said, "Crying?"

"No. Very concerned about loss of innocence. 'We've lost our innocence!' she kept saying. I said, 'Try to relax.' I told her I didn't think I'd be home for dinner."

"And when she said, 'We've lost our innocence,' did she mean America?"

"Yeah. Obviously she was watching TV."

He was finally able to contact Hernandez, who indeed had remained loyally parked at City Hall through both collapses. Hernandez was apparently unscathed. He later described the experience to me in the most pragmatic terms, without bewilderment or self-pity, even though he had watched the towers fall from close by, had been hit by the successive debris storms, and had lost family in the attack. He said, "You go into that alert, that automatic alert. You're just waiting to do the right thing. To me the right thing was to turn on all the flashing lights on the car. In case somebody

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needed help, they could come to the car. But I wasn't going to move out of there until I heard from the Commissioner."

Hernandez was thirty-nine years old. He had immigrated to New York from the Dominican Republic at age thirteen, in December of 1975, and despite the cold weather had immediately felt at home. He had become a citizen in 1994. He had led exercise classes at a Jack LaLanne gym, and had met his wife there. He had taken a job with the city for the security it offered. He was a good worker. He was willing and uncomplaining. He was very clean-cut. He did not drink or smoke. He had three little children, and was a good father. Now he was the perfect soldier, an American ideal. While hundreds of panicked people went running by, some in the wrong direction, he stayed at his post by his Ford Crown Victoria, and without fear.

Two women rushed up to him in terror, hugging each other and sobbing. "Oh, my God, the towers fell!" Hernandez calmed them down. They walked away. He spotted a couple of wounded policemen on their hands and knees, one of them bleeding from the head. He got them into the back of the car, and gave them a blanket with which to wipe around their mouths and eyes. They called him their guardian angel. The dust cleared. Attracted by the flashing lights, a woman approached who was shaking all over and could not speak. Hernandez found help for her and returned to the car. He noticed that his cell phone and radio links had been disrupted. After ninety minutes in position, he realized that Holden would no longer be looking for him here. He drove the policemen to the vicinity of a first-aid station, and then headed slowly uptown. Eventually the cell phone began to function, and Holden got through to him. They had a short, happy reunion on Carmine Street, in Greenwich Village. By early afternoon Hernandez had parked downtown again, and like a good soldier was waiting close to where he had waited before. Holden and Burton had met up in the police headquarters nearby, where a temporary command center had been established, and they were trying to marshal the DDC's resources to help. Hernandez wanted to help too. He was not tired or bored. He was patient and proud. He felt love for his adopted country. He had never been in combat, but understood waiting as the experience of war. The streets were mostly quiet. Heavy smoke was rising into the sky.

Holden and Burton responded tactically, with no grand strategy in mind. At the police headquarters they discovered a telephone in a room off the temporary command center—a chaotic hall filled with officials struggling to get organized—and they began making calls. No one asked them to do this, or told them to stop. One of the deputy mayors there had formally been given the task of coordinating the construction response, but with little idea of how to proceed, he had so far done nothing at all. Holden and Burton themselves were operating blind, groping forward through the afternoon with only the vaguest concept of the realities on the ground. The DDC's previous experience with emergencies had been limited to a sinking EMS station in Brooklyn, caused by a water-main break, and a structural failure at Yankee Stadium, one week before baseball's opening day. Burton could not now bring himself to believe that the Trade Center towers had completely collapsed. Imagining the need to protect people from falling glass, he phoned a scaffolding company and requested that they prepare to load a half mile of sidewalk bridging onto their trucks. Holden later told me this seemed to him like taking a Band-Aid to a gunshot wound—but at the time there were more important things to do than quibble. It seemed likely that hundreds of people lay trapped in the ruins, suffering and slowly dying. Holden arranged for a police escort to bring in twenty-five light towers from Queens for the coming night. Burton established an expanding "phone tree," alerting the city's heavy-construction industry to ready itself for emergency requests later in the day.

As might be expected, the industry was something of an intimate circle, in which many of the top people had known each other for years. Burton himself was one of them, though he was currently engaged in a foray through government service. Faced with the urgent need to get crews and heavy equipment onto the job, he bypassed ordinary bidding procedures and made some immediate choices on the basis of personal and corporate reputations, asking AMEC, Bovis, Turner, and the family-owned Tully to send representatives to an initial meeting that afternoon at police headquarters. As it turned out, these were the four companies that ultimately would share the lucrative job of cleaning up, earning profits in the millions, though at considerable exposure to potential claims and lawsuits, because neither the companies nor the city were ever able to obtain adequate insurance for the Trade Center project. Cynics who later implied that the choice of these companies was in some way an insiders' deal were only superficially right. The four companies were simply the first that came to Burton's mind—and on the day of the collapse they responded altruistically in the face of enormous confusion, thinking at the most a few days ahead, without even the possibility of calculating gain. Holden agreed that they were some of the best in the business, and he signed off as well on bringing in the renowned engineering firm of Thornton-Tomasetti. Soon afterward the firm's habitually well-dressed president, Richard Tomasetti, met up with some of the other chosen representatives, and rode in an escorted van to police headquarters downtown.

The first meeting didn't amount to much, in part because police officials refused to give the group access to the site, forcing the construction men to begin planning their response on the strength of television images and secondhand news. It was understandable if the police were perhaps overly rigid, or were operating on the basis of suddenly obsolete concepts of public safety: they had seen thousands of citizens killed just a

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few hours before, and had lost twenty-three of their own people, and for the very reasons they had chosen the profession, many of them must have had great difficulty with America's apparent loss of control. Nonetheless, crowds of unskilled volunteers were already swarming over the site, and forming the valiant but nearly useless bucket brigades. Holden and Burton believed urgently that their group had important capabilities to offer the search-and-rescue effort, and they felt increasingly frustrated as the day dragged toward night and they continued to be blocked. They also felt emotions that Holden could not admit to then but later described to me as only human—an urge to get to the center of the action, and a powerful curiosity about conditions at the site. The two men kept demanding to go in, and despite a short setback when World Trade Center Seven collapsed, they finally wore the police down. At 5:30 that afternoon they got permission for their nascent team of unbuilders to explore the ruins firsthand.

The walk they took became famous at the site because of the forces it unleashed. About fifteen people went along, including Holden and Burton, the engineer Richard Tomasetti, and a collection of tough construction guys. Though every one of these men was accustomed to grappling with problems on a very large scale, none was prepared for a disaster so vast and severe. Wading through paper litter and pulverized concrete, they tried to approach from the north, but were blocked by heavy smoke. Few of them had respirators. They moved upwind to the Hudson, and flanked southward again, cutting through the peripheral public areas of the heavily damaged World Financial Center, a high-rise complex that stood between the Trade Center and the river. Conditions there were so strange that Holden afterward had trouble knowing where they had been, though he did remember one surreal passage through a ruined atrium restaurant where all the fire alarms were blaring, *wah, wah, wah.*

Then, through an opening between buildings, they came suddenly upon the Trade Center ruins themselves—the skeletal walls and smoking hills of rubble where the towers had been, the boxy shell of the Marriott hotel, the heavy steel spears protruding from neighboring buildings, the collapsed north pedestrian bridge, the massive external column sections thrown every which way across the streets, and everywhere the fires. For Holden it looked like a scene from *Apocalypse Now*. He told me, "It was hallucinogenic—quasi-druggy, with flares shooting up and death in the air. There was a sense of crazed panic, people fighting to save lives, fire hoses cascading all over the place." For the next ninety minutes they moved through a smoky twilight among the ruins. The ground was littered with hundreds of shoes, presumably from victims, but characteristically for this unusually imploded killing zone, not a single corpse lay in sight. Afterward Holden was nearly at a loss for words to describe what went on in his mind. He said, "Cars. I remember everywhere you'd walk there were crushed cars. Some that had burned. Sparks flying. Flames shooting. Smoke all over the place. People desperately trying to move the debris. The light was dim. It was just this really odd, frantic atmosphere. We were walking through twisted debris. It was completely startling—like a 'Holy shit!' experience. Every corner you turned was 'Holy shit!'"

Mike Burton and Richard Tomasetti stayed together, each struggling to maintain an analytical frame of mind. It helped to confer with each other. Their focus was on lifting the steel to uncover survivors. It was obvious that large numbers of skilled workers were necessary, along with more heavy equipment than the two men could have imagined before. They needed not just the largest diesel excavators and cranes to pick up the pieces but, for lack of stockpiling space, a fleet of trucks to haul off the debris—and they needed it all right away. The first problem was access: a major effort would be required to clear a path down West Street just to get equipment to the ruins of the north pedestrian bridge. That bridge by chance was a Tomasetti design, and it was stout, but it had been hit with impossible force when the North Tower fell. Now it was blocking the best route to the pile.

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The group moved south under the crackling flames of a burning building, a 1907 landmark at 90 West Street, and they skirted a severed 767 wheel before heading back toward the center of the site by the severely wounded Bankers Trust building. Suddenly a fireman rushed up to Burton and Tomasetti, and said, "Listen, there's a water-main break, and there's no pressure to fight the fires. What we want to do is tap into the water tower at the top of this building." He pointed to Bankers Trust. "I want to know if it's safe."

Was it because of their office clothes? The fireman did not know Burton or Tomasetti, but had clearly taken them for engineers. Burton looked at Tomasetti, who peered at the building through the smoke, and hesitated. The structure had been speared and torn open. The fireman mentioned that his people had already been in the basement, searching

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for victims. Tomasetti said, "Well, it's kind of dark out, but the building seems to be missing only one column . . ."

As the second-in-command of an obscure city agency in Queens, Burton had not the slightest authority here at the Trade Center site, but he was willing to assume it anyway. This was typical of him. Burton's brashness was well known within the DDC, where people tended to be wary of him for his disdain of procedure, and for what many saw as his arrogance. Holden himself was wary of Burton, and said he felt the need to "cage" him regularly, but he recognized Burton's effectiveness nonetheless. Burton was the DDC's doer. And Burton had an agile mind. He was said to be a right-wing conservative but he was also surprisingly supple, and he understood now that conventional standards of safety simply did not apply to these ruins. To the fireman he said, "Listen. You've already been in the building. You've already risked your life once. It would take us a week in daylight to tell whether the building is safe or not. If you climb the stairs on the far side, it's probably okay. That's a guess. But it won't be any riskier than where you've already been." With that the fireman murmured into a walkie-talkie and disappeared. Burton exchanged glances with Tomasetti. He saw a group of firemen go running toward the building, and wondered about the wisdom of his advice. He did not waffle publicly, however, and it later turned out that he was right. Bankers Trust did not fall—and indeed, not a single person was killed during the nine months of the recovery effort that ensued. Burton had just made the first of his many quick decisions at the Trade Center site. He knew already what others soon discovered—that he had a particular talent for making up his mind.

The group returned to police headquarters after dark, and worked through the night, mobilizing columns of equipment and thousands of skilled laborers, considering the rudiments of a disposal program, laying out the role of engineers, planning the first rapid inspections of hundreds of neighboring buildings, and outlining a four-quadrant overlay that would divide the excavation work according to the simplest geometry. The four-quadrant pattern owed as much to the presence of the four companies on that evening's tour as to a compelling operational logic, but while it endured, during the first urgent months, it functioned reasonably well. There was no time for refined planning anyway. Holden went home, and got two hours of sleep; Burton spent fifteen minutes dozing in his Jeep. Then they returned to the site and continued to work tirelessly. They were bit players at best, at least on the organizational charts, and did not pretend otherwise: the mayor's Office of Emergency Management was supposed to be coordinating things, and the main response was overwhelmingly and appropriately the fire department's. But to a degree that was surprising even to Holden and Burton, over the next few days they were able to bring New York's enormous construction energies to bear. As individuals, they remained almost invisible, but their influence rapidly grew.

None of this reflected the normal operation of the U.S. emergency-response system. After natural and man-made disasters in the past—notably the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Building, in Oklahoma City—the efforts on the ground had rapidly been nationalized under the direction of FEMA and its operational allies in the Army Corps of Engineers, a branch of the military that calls itself the world's largest public engineering, design, and construction-management agency. These people in turn dealt primarily with pre-assigned companies that specialized in the disaster-cleanup business (many based in Florida, along the hurricane tracks). The system was intelligently organized and charted—and given the frequency of destructive weather in North America, it was well exercised. It was not, however, quite prepared to operate with a speed and intensity equal to New York's.

Ken Holden, for one, didn't even consider turning to the outside for help. He was vaguely aware of FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers, but with no previous experience in national emergencies, he neither knew nor wondered about the protocol. He might have assumed that ultimately the federal government would pay the bill, but afterward he had no memory that such questions crossed his mind. To me he said, "None of us wondered, 'Should we contact the state? Should we contact the feds? FEMA? The Army Corps?' It was just 'We've got a disaster here. Let's fix it.' It was instinctive. 'Let's give the fire department access. Let's let the police see if they can rescue their own. This is not out of our realm.'"

By "realm" he meant professional expertise, but he might as well have been talking about his beloved city. He was a typically proud New Yorker. He said, "As I kept explaining to FEMA later, this is not Oklahoma. We had the equipment. We had the connections. We could handle it. We just went in and did what we had to do. And no one said no."

"Did anyone say yes?"

"No. But then again, we weren't asking."

More than pride was at play: Holden simply did not have the time to seek permissions. The rush to find survivors was hopeful at first, and then less so. Sam Melisi later described for me the wild-eyed urgency of the initial search. Speaking of the lost firemen, who throughout the months to come provided a focus to the recovery efforts, he said, "These were people you had worked with, and they were maybe alive. You knew they were trapped in there, and there was a sense of franticness, and it was personal. I remember crawling through the steel—it would have probably been by the hotel. There were some spaces that let you get below and take a look around. It wasn't regulated at all. The first couple of days, anything went. It wasn't like somebody was saying, 'You can't go in there, you can't do this, you can't do that.' It was more like 'Hey, if you think you can get in there, go ahead.' All bets were off. It was just 'Go and bring somebody home.'"

At age forty-three, Melisi was a small, wiry man who had

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ADDRESS: NOWHERE.
SKILLS: NONE.

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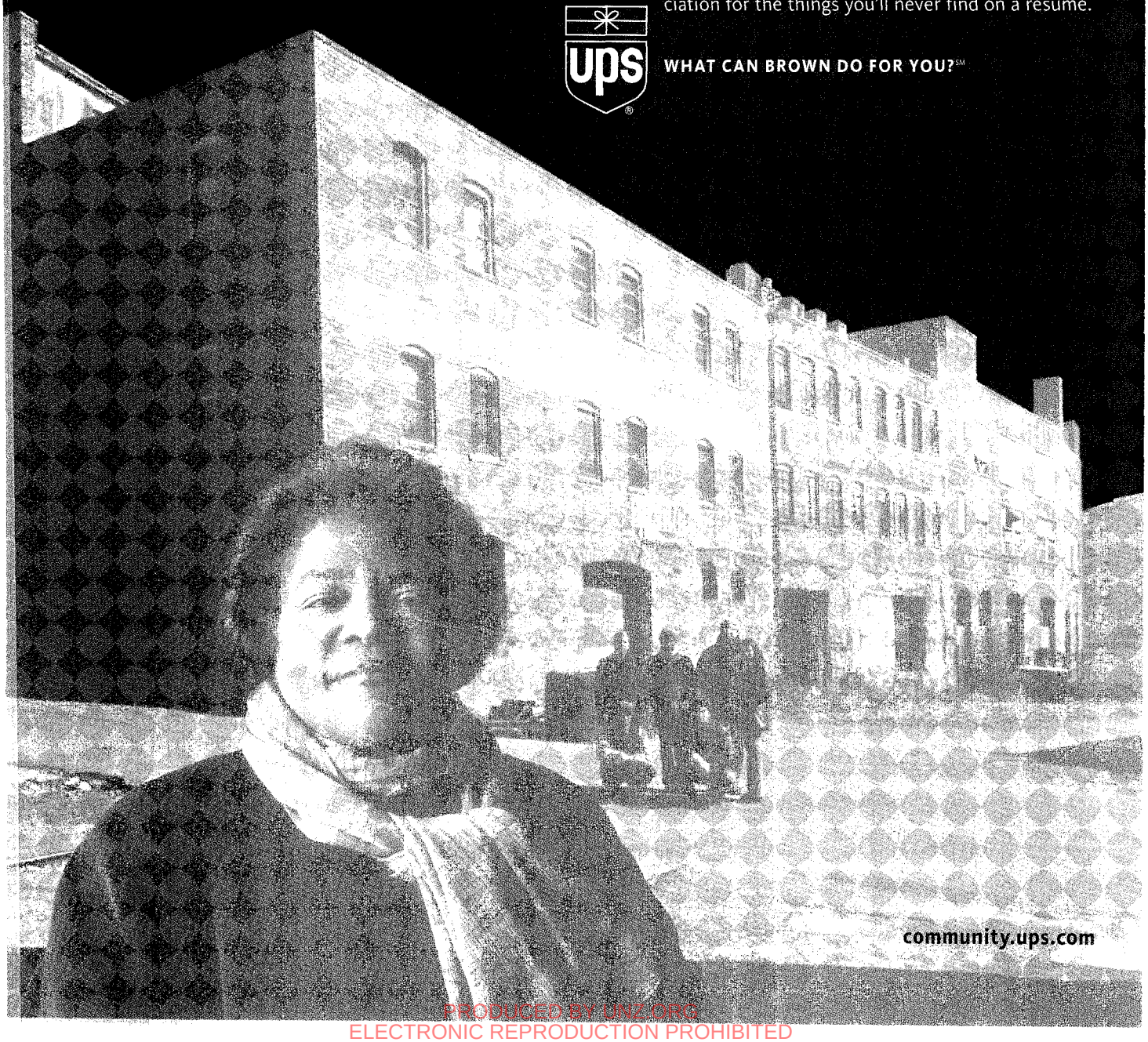

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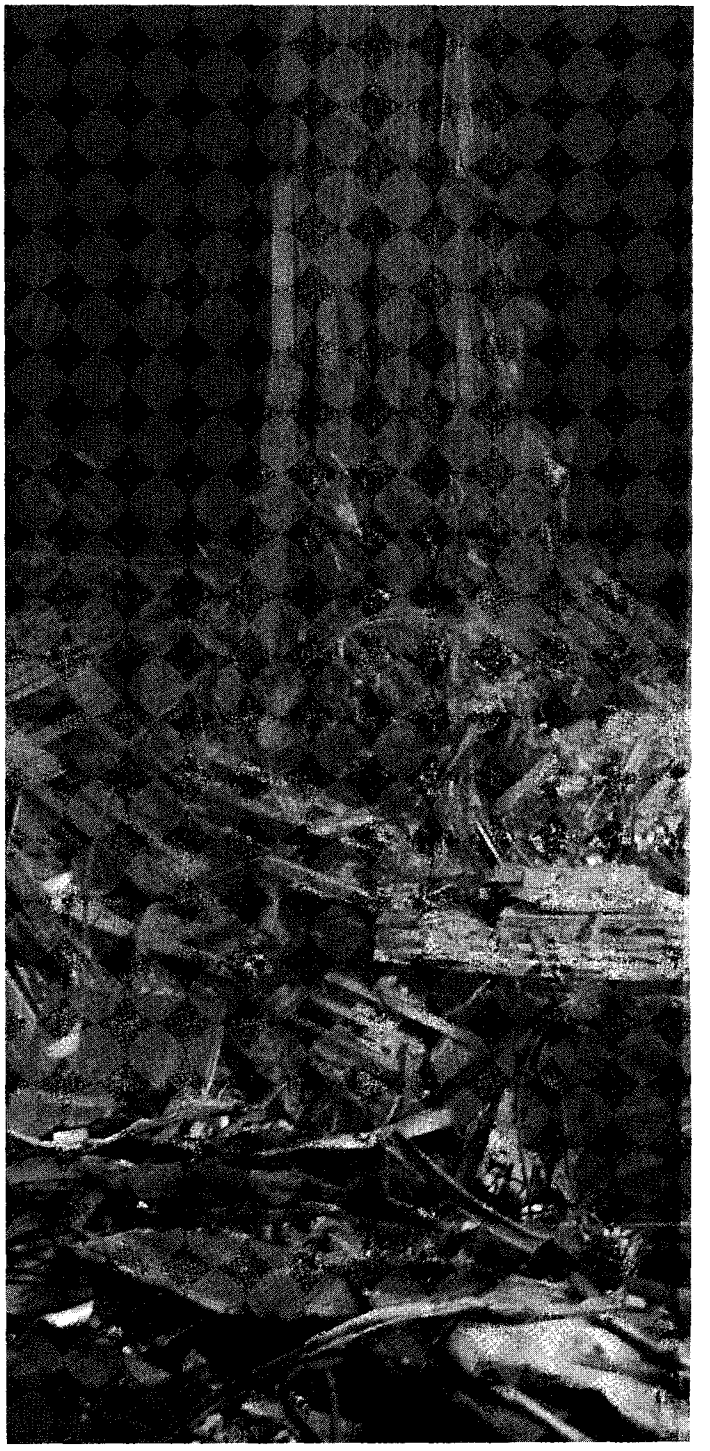
a disarming way of suggesting his opinions rather than asserting them. He had a nasal voice and a big moustache. He was obviously somewhat shy. Within the wolf-pack world of the Trade Center site he became known at first simply because his diffidence was unique. Still, he was a fireman through and through, with strong allegiances to the department and a blue-collar history that was fairly standard for the type. He grew up on Staten Island as the son of a diver with a small marine-salvage business, and he excelled in high school before heading to college in Oregon, where, cut off from his roots, he floundered. After dropping out of school, he hired on at a sawmill for six months, and then returned to New York, went to work in heavy construction, and eventually became a licensed equipment and crane operator. At the advanced age of twenty-seven he joined the fire department because of the generous time off ("Like being on permanent vacation," he told me) and only then discovered the job's power to mold people's lives, including his own. So far he had put sixteen years into the service—in various ladder and rescue companies, and most recently as an assistant in the engine room of the city's 1938 fireboat, called the *Firefighter*. Because of his heavy-equipment experience and additional training, he also served on a specialized collapsed-building team, which had responded to the 1993 bombing of the Trade Center and had been dispatched to the subsequent bombing in Oklahoma City and to a hurricane disaster in the Dominican Republic. He lived with his wife and two young children on Staten Island, in a surprisingly rural setting—a small wooden house from the 1840s with a large back yard bordering on a forest preserve and littered with old construction equipment, including a small crane. (One day at the site he said, "People here keep saying how strange it all looks, but I dunno, it kind of looks like my back yard.") In a shed at the end of his yard he had built a welding and machine shop. The jobs he did there helped him to supplement his modest salary. Sometimes he moonlighted as an electrician. Sometimes he was a plumber, sometimes a carpenter, too.

When the first airplane hit, Melisi put down his reading in the *Firefighter*'s engine room, and prepared to get under way. When the second airplane hit, he understood it meant war, and he had a strange impression of feeling every possible emotion all at once. When the South Tower fell, the boat was plowing at full speed across New York Harbor, and the twin diesels were roaring. When the North Tower fell, the boat was pulling up to shore, and the diesels were still so loud that Melisi did not hear the thunder. The boat docked just north of the North Cove, along a riverfront promenade. Melisi emerged from the engine room and helped the deck crew drag hose to the fire-suppression teams on the northwest corner of the site. He returned to the boat and helped to engage its pumps, which delivered enormous quantities of harbor water to the ruins over the following two weeks. Aware of Melisi's training in collapsed buildings and rescue operations, his supervisor then cut him loose. He said, "Just go. See what you can do." This turned out to be more than a little thing. Melisi's maritime career had come suddenly to a halt.



He joined the scramble through the smoke and debris, searching for cavities in which people might have survived. This was a collapse unlike any he had seen before, and not only in size. Though the top layer of the pile was jagged, it was also fantastically dense, and it offered little in the way of natural shelters, or of access to the underground. Melisi circled to the north side, where fires raged and Building Seven threatened to fall, but the devastation was less severe. Handi-

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capped by the lack of a flashlight, he joined a rescue team that descended through a crater in Building Six and made multiple attempts on the North Tower basements, but was blocked each time by smoke and heavy debris. Back on the surface again, he moved down West Street, squeezed under the ruins of the north pedestrian bridge between the hulks of crushed fire trucks, and spent the afternoon with a shovel, digging for survivors and uncovering only the dead. He arrived in the site's southwest corner that evening at about the same time that Ken Holden, Mike Burton, and the unbuilding crew first came walking through. Melisi neither knew nor noticed them then, but he shared some of their construction expertise, and he had drawn conclusions similar to theirs—that the bucket brigades he saw operating on the pile were ineffectual, and that if victims were to be found alive, it was essential to bring in large cranes and grapplers that could lift the fallen steel columns and expose cavities below the surface. Typically, Melisi did something practical about it right away. He worked to clear an access route from the south, directing front-end loaders to shove cars and toppled lampposts aside, opening a path that detoured around the heaviest obstacles. A perverse pattern then prevailed: the fast-moving small equipment was

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the first to arrive, and time and again it had to be dismantled or laboriously moved out of the way in order to allow the larger and more effective pieces in; because of the quantities of debris, space was simply not available for both. The delays were frustrating for Sam Melisi, who through his actions and expertise was unintentionally already involved in the management of the site. The greater frustration came later, however, and it was the near total lack of survivors.

The lack was partly definitional, since it excluded the 15,000 people who were able to walk away, in some cases even after the buildings fell. Their survival, however, did not diminish the reality that thousands remained unaccounted for, or the terrible feeling in those first confused hours and days that time was running out. It went without saying that the survivors who mattered were the ones who might now be lying trapped in the debris. They turned out to be rare: over the subsequent months of retrieval it became obvious from the condition of the bodies that few if any of the victims had perished while awaiting rescue. By the final count, in a place where nearly 3,000 had died, only eighteen people were recovered alive. Two of them were injured policemen discovered on the first day in the underground concourse, a shopping area east of the South Tower that had been speared and pummeled by falling columns but not completely crushed. The remaining sixteen were all found among the ruins of the North Tower. Fourteen of them—twelve firemen, one policeman, and one civilian office worker—came through largely unscathed in an intact stairwell section between the second and fourth floors, sandwiched between collapses. When they were rescued, also on the first day, they emerged from the ground as if from the bowels of hell, and cheering broke out across the site.

But only two other people were ever found alive. Both were Port Authority employees caught at relatively high elevations in the North Tower. They did not "surf" the collapse, as a couple of Port Authority cops were falsely rumored to have done in the South Tower, but they lived through falls that should have killed them. The first of them worked with Peter Rinaldi, the Port Authority engineer then vacationing on the Outer Banks of North Carolina and destined to play an important role at the site. This survivor's name was Pasquale Buzzelli. At age thirty-two, he was a staff engineer whose job was primarily to oversee work on the George Washington Bridge—including Rinaldi's project of decorating the span with lights. Buzzelli was riding an intermediate-stage elevator to his office, on the sixty-fourth floor, when the 767 slammed into the North Tower far above. The elevator shook violently, and briefly dropped before catching itself and returning slowly to its starting point, the "sky lobby" on the forty-fourth floor. When the doors opened, Buzzelli was confronted by a confusion of shouts and thick black smoke (presumably from burning jet fuel that had poured down other shafts). He retreated into the elevator and, with no way to go but up, instinctively pushed the button for his familiar sixty-fourth floor. It was a slow ride. When he got there, the floor looked well lit and calm, and it was almost smoke-free. Most of the workers had already left, but more than a dozen remained, and were dutifully awaiting instructions from the authorities below, as apparently they had been asked to do by Port Authority and fire-department officials on the phone. Because the group included Buzzelli's supervisor, a man named Pat Hoey, Buzzelli decided to stay too. He said, "What happened, Pat?"

Hoey said, "I don't know, but I was just about thrown out of my chair."

"Really? I thought it was some kind of elevator thing."

Hoey called downstairs to the Port Authority communications center, and was unable to get clear information. He seemed edgy, but more from frustration than fear. Buzzelli called his wife, who was seven months pregnant with their first child. He said, "Don't be alarmed or anything like that. I'm okay. Just put on the TV. Tell me if something has happened."

He waited. After a while she came back and said, "Oh, my God, Pasquale! There's a plane in your building!"

Buzzelli lived up to the reputation of engineers as unflappable. He said, "All right, all right. Don't get excited." (When he recounted the conversation later, he explained, "She was getting all worried and stuff.") He said, "Just, can you please tell me where it is? Did it hit high, middle, or low?" ("Because she doesn't really know the floors and stuff.")

She said, "Well, it looks pretty high up in the building."

This was of course good news. Buzzelli had been through the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and was not overly concerned. He said, "Okay. Well, just so you know, I'm okay, and we're here, and we're going to figure out what to do." It took them a while. They learned that the South Tower, too, had been hit by an airplane—but they neither heard nor saw the impact. Their offices occupied the northwest corner of the North Tower, as far from the South Tower as could be. They were surprisingly isolated, and were unaware that their upstairs neighbors were jumping from their windows and falling by outside.

They stuffed wet coats under the doors against the faint

He felt the building rumble, and immediately afterward heard a tremendous pounding coming at him from above, as the upper floors pancaked. The pounding was rhythmic, and it intensified fast, as if a monstrous boulder were bounding down the stairwell toward his head.

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smoke that was drifting though the elevator lobby. Apparently their reactions were slowed by a sort of collective inertia: believing they had been told to stay, they worked the phones looking for someone who could give them a schedule for the evacuation. They delayed for more than an hour, during which a man who would have told them immediately to go, the Port Authority's chief engineer, Frank Lombardi, climbed down the stairs from his office overhead, but of course without checking in on every floor. At 9:59 they heard muted thunder and felt the building vibrate. It was the South Tower collapsing, an unimaginable event; they attributed the commotion to something much less, maybe a piece of airplane breaking free and sliding down the outside. But the smoke in the elevator lobby was growing thicker. Buzzelli and another man unblocked the doors and went out to check the nearest stairwell, which they found clear and well lit. They returned to the office and reported the news. At last the group started walking down from the sixty-fourth floor.

There were sixteen of them. They moved at different speeds and eventually spread out over at least nine floors. The stairway descended with left turns, in a counterclockwise direction, and it was of course windowless and completely cut off from the outside. About a third of the way down (in the forties) Buzzelli began to encounter exhausted firemen, some of whom were sitting on the steps and resting. They knew no better than he that the South Tower had fallen or that their forces had been ordered to retreat. They were calm, and said, "Just keep going down, clear run. Keep going down, clear run."

Buzzelli had just passed the twenty-second floor when the North Tower gave way. It was 10:28 in the morning, an hour and forty-two minutes after the attack. Buzzelli felt the building rumble, and immediately afterward heard a tremendous pounding coming at him from above, as the upper floors pancaked. Buzzelli's memory of it afterward was distinct. The pounding was rhythmic, and it intensified fast, as if a monstrous boulder were bounding down the stairwell toward his head. He reacted viscerally by diving halfway down a flight of stairs, and curling into the corner of a landing. He knew that the building was failing. Buzzelli was Catholic. He closed his eyes and prayed for his wife and unborn child. He prayed for a quick death. Because his eyes were closed, he felt rather than saw the walls crack open around him. For an instant the walls folded onto his head and arms, and he felt pressure, but then the structure disintegrated beneath him, and he thought, "I'm going," and began to fall. He kept his eyes closed. He felt the weightlessness of acceleration. The sensation reminded him of thrill rides he had enjoyed at Great Adventure, in New Jersey. He did not enjoy it now, but did not actively dislike it either. He did not actively do anything at all. He felt the wind on his face, and a sandblasting effect as he tumbled through the clouds of debris. He saw four flashes from small blows to the head, and then another really bright flash when he landed. Right after that he opened his eyes, and it was three hours later.

He sat up. He saw blue sky and a world of shattered steel and concrete. He had landed on a slab like a sacrificial altar, perched high among mountains of ruin. There was a drop of fifteen feet to the debris below him. He saw heavy smoke in the air. Above his head rose a lovely skeletal wall, a lacy gothic thing that looked as if it would topple at any moment. He remembered his fall exactly, and assumed therefore that he was dead. He waited to see if death would be as it is shown in the movies—if an angel would come by, or if he would float up and see himself from the outside. But then he started to cough and to feel pain in his leg, and he realized that he was alive. He was trapped high on the altar, injured, and covered with a slick powdery dust. He shouted for help and called out the names of the people who had accompanied him down the stairs, but heard only silence in response, and saw no movement of a human kind. Where the Twin Towers should have stood he saw only smoke and sky. Somehow an entire huge building had passed him on its way to the ground. Somehow also he had landed just right. Buzzelli was a Catholic but not a theologian. He was also always an engineer. For nearly an hour he sat trapped on the altar trying to reason things through.

Conditions were still precarious. The altar itself was unstable, threatening to topple or collapse. Buzzelli was too badly injured to climb down. He worried that if he rolled off his perch—simply allowed himself to drop—he would be impaled by the twisted steel below. Increasingly he had trouble staying calm. He was alone. He was helpless. And when the silence was finally broken, it was not by people coming to save him but by the crackle of an approaching fire. The fire came from an area behind him, which from his position he could not see. He worried that the fire would weaken the steel and cause the wall to topple onto him—or, worse, that the fire would burn him alive. Judging from the sound, the danger was growing rapidly. Then he heard someone call, "Richie!" It was a fireman climbing unseen through the rubble nearby, attempting to locate the eleven stairwell survivors, one of whom had established radio contact and was guiding in the rescuers.

Buzzelli started shouting, "Help, help! I'm up here!"

Eventually the fireman materialized below the altar. He looked up at Buzzelli and said, "Oh. Do you need a rope to get down?" He seemed to think Buzzelli was an errant rescuer who had gotten stranded during the search.

Buzzelli said, "I'll jump if you want me to, but I can't climb down alone."

This was not what the fireman expected to hear. He did a double take and said, "Oh, my God. Guys, we've got a civilian up here!"

Other firemen arrived and began to discuss how to get Buzzelli down. It was not an obvious thing. They were worried about the instability of the debris slopes as well as

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To my daughter JC,

My love for you is unconditional, and remains so to the end. My only heartbreak is that I probably will not be around to help raise my little grandchild, Ally.

Love Mom

To Pat,

I really don't know how much time I have left, but I would like to tell you what a good friend you are and have been. Thanks again my long time pal.

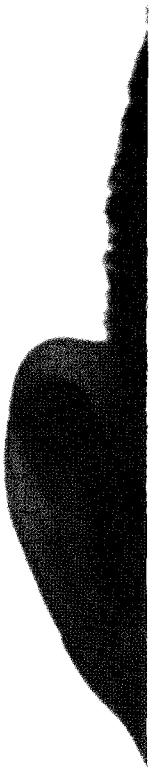
Love Linda

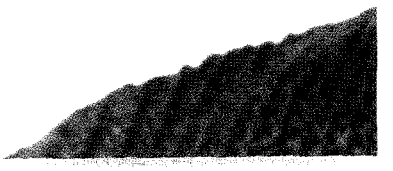
To Ally,

You're only 2 1/2 years old now, but in the event I don't see you grow up to adulthood, please don't ever take up smoking. I smoked for 42 years. I have lung cancer. You know your grandma would never lie to you, but other people will.

Love Grandma

For information on quitting smoking, call 1-800-4-A-LEGACY or visit www.americanlegacy.org. Every second counts.





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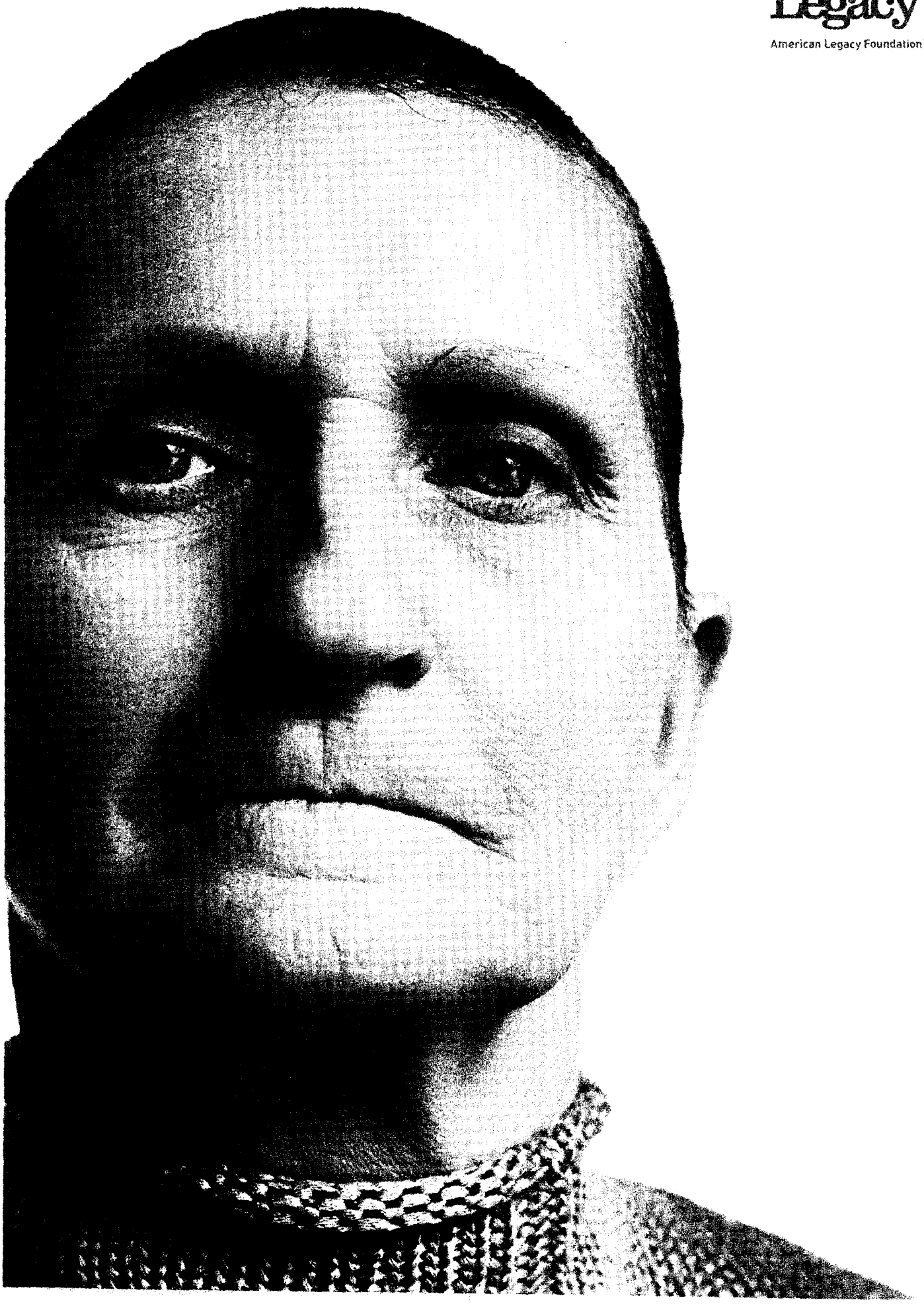
Legacy

American Legacy Foundation



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the obvious precariousness of Buzzelli's perch. They were also worried, of course, about the fire. Indeed, the flames then flared up, and began to come on so aggressively that the firemen retreated. As they disappeared, one of them yelled, "Hold on! We'll get back to you!" The promise was of little comfort to Buzzelli, who figured, probably correctly, that the firemen would not have left him if there was any way they could have stayed.

Buzzelli by now was thoroughly terrified. The fire was roaring, popping, and setting off small explosions just behind the altar. He still could not see the flames, but he could feel their searing heat. Now he heard a new, more intimate sound, which he took to be the groaning and sizzling of metal. This was the end. Desperate to assume control over his fate, he groped around and found a scrap of sharp steel with which to slash his wrists. He was about to cut himself open when, strangely, just as suddenly as the fire had grown, it subsided and died. A few minutes later the firemen reappeared. One named Jimmy said, "All right, we'll get to you somehow." He circled clockwise around the altar, disappeared for a stretch of dangerous climbing, and pioneered a route to an alcove high in the rubble mountains above and behind Buzzelli. Somehow he clambered down to the altar. Three others followed. The firemen then fashioned a rope cradle, got it around Buzzelli, and lowered him to the debris slope below.

The group still had 400 yards of difficult terrain to go. Despite the severe pain in his leg, Buzzelli walked about halfway before beginning to lose consciousness. The firemen put him onto a plastic stretcher known as a Stokes basket, and they passed him down the pile in the manner of the bucket brigades. In the ambulance a kindly attendant lent him a cell phone to call his wife. She was at home, surrounded by friends and family. It was 4:00 in the afternoon. She said, "Oh, my God, I can't believe ..." He heard an uproar in the background. He said, "Yeah, I'm alive." He was taken to Saint Vincent's Hospital, where the other patients were firemen or cops who had been lightly injured after the buildings came down. The staff assumed that Buzzelli was just another one. He had some cuts and bruises, and a broken right foot—that was all. They told him to go home or sleep in the cafeteria if he liked, because they were still thinking triage then, and standing by for a rush.

The last survivor found was Genelle Guzman, a thirty-one-year-old Port Authority clerk of Trinidadian origin, who had delayed with Buzzelli and the others on the sixty-fourth floor, but had gotten ahead in the descent, and was on the thirteenth floor when the building boomed and broke apart around her. She was with a friend named Rosa, and had stopped to adjust her shoe. She had put her hand on Rosa's shoulder. As the building crumbled, she felt the shoulder pull away, as if Rosa were running up the staircase. She was hit, and felt the acceleration of the collapse around her. All was darkness. When the roar stopped, she heard a couple of calls from a man who then grew silent. Her head was jammed under a load of debris, but eventually she worked it loose. She was in a dark cavity in the inner world of rubble. Her legs were pinned and crushed. She felt a dead man beside her. It turned out that he was a fireman, and that there was another one, also dead, lying nearby. For twenty-seven hours Guzman lay trapped and seriously injured. She spent some of that time bargaining for her soul, pleading with God to show her a miracle. Early the next afternoon she heard a search party, and when she yelled out, a voice answered. The voice said, "Do you see the light?" She did not. She took a piece of concrete and banged it against a broken stairway overhead—presumably the same structure that had saved her life. The searchers homed in on the noise. Guzman wedged her hand through a crack in the wall, and felt someone take it. A voice said, "I've got you," and Guzman said, "Thank God." She spent the next five weeks at New York's Bellevue Hospital, undergoing reconstructive surgery on her right leg. She was the last person to emerge alive from the ruins.

Of course, that was not at all obvious on September 12—and probably even less so at the site than elsewhere. Experience with earthquakes and earlier bombings suggested that a significant percentage of people caught in the collapses would still be alive. This had been true even with Hiroshima. Sam Melisi said, "All we knew was that time was of the essence. It was just really important that we get to people as soon as possible, because the longer we delayed, the less the chance of survival was. We knew that from other collapses we'd gone into."

I asked him an academic, almost nonsensical question. "What's the rule on that? Is there a known interval?"

Melisi said, "Sometimes people write about the 'Golden Hour,' and this and that. But it depends on their injuries." Are they crushed? Can they breathe? By any chance do they have water? Victims have been known to last a week trapped in rubble. Victims have been known to last longer. Melisi said, "It was hard to be sure of anything. We knew we were looking for people, and we knew they were there somewhere."

It was a grim sort of hope, therefore, rather than specific knowledge, that inspired the early rush at the site. Having lost its headquarters bunker with the collapse of Building Seven, the city's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) was showing surprising flexibility—a mature recognition by some of its senior staff members that their plans and procedures had been overtaken by events, and that their organization lacked the capability to direct the response at the site. They knew that their most useful role now would be to help with some of the logistics—office space, food supplies, press briefings, and so forth—and to coordinate between the myriad governmental agencies that were starting to crowd forward and jump into the fray. With those finite goals in mind, the OEM moved fast. By the second day it had set up an emergency command center in the ground-

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floor cafeteria of the abandoned Public School 89, two blocks north of the main ruins.

For the first several days the scene in the cafeteria was frenzied. A marine-construction manager named Marty Corcoran told me early on about his attempts to make sense of the chaos. Corcoran was a tall, powerfully built man who looked as if he might enjoy crumbling concrete with his bare hands, but who also turned out to be a sensitive observer of the Trade Center response. He had arrived the day after the attack on behalf of his employer, Weeks Marine, a New Jersey–based concern that, having rallied in heartfelt reaction to the disaster, had also quite rationally understood the need to set up a big barging operation. In the long run the company's motivations were probably about typical for the Trade Center site—neither as altruistic as they were over the first few days, nor as mercenary as some later liked to insinuate. After three hours of wandering the site in astonishment and confusion, Corcoran found his way into the headquarters at PS 89, where he assumed he would discover a traditional chain of command. He said, "It was unbelievable. There are ten thousand meetings going on. Equipment is being mobilized to different places. The OEM has lost everything—it's like all their preparations were thrown out the window. Now you have OEM, you have the fire department, you have EMS, you have Salvation Army, you have all these billions of people involved, and you're sitting at a cafeteria table trying to discuss something with all these distractions going on around your head. It was insane."

Corcoran heard that the site had been divided into quadrants, and that they had been assigned to four companies—every one of which struck him as an unexpected choice. To me he said, "Who's AMEC? Who's Bovis? Oh, we knew Turner, but they're construction managers—they don't even do the work themselves. The only company here with equipment was Tully, and Tully is well connected with the city, I guess. That's how they ..." He hesitated, worried possibly that I would interpret this as an allegation of impropriety, which in context it certainly was not. He said, "I never quite understood how it happened, but it was kind of moot at that point. If these were the rules of the game, you just had to figure out how you were going to play by them." It turned out that the only rules that mattered were those related to speed and physical progress, and Corcoran was good at them. He heard about an obscure city agency called the DDC that for unknown reasons was emerging in an unscripted leading role. A couple of guys there were said to be making decisions. Apparently the one to see was a man with a moustache and narrow shoulders, named Mike Burton.

Corcoran found Burton under full assault on the far side of the cafeteria. Later he said, "He was just being bombarded by people. I tried to explain to him what we do and don't do. I can remember the look on his face. It was like ..." Corcoran pondered the memory. "Like he was a deer caught in headlights. Like 'Where's the next shot coming from?' And I felt embarrassed, because it was like I was speaking another language to him. The last thing he wanted to hear was some marine contractor coming in with ideas and schemes."

But the scheme Corcoran had in mind was important. Already by that second day huge volumes of steel and debris were emerging from the site as AMEC fought its way down West Street toward the north pedestrian bridge, and Bovis came in from the south, both companies working furiously to clear room for the cranes and heavy equipment that might help in the search for survivors. Tully was cranking up too, over in the southeast corner. Something had to be done with the resulting material, and right away, or it would start to clog the rescue operation. But this was not Oklahoma City, where cattle still graze close to downtown, and empty space is everywhere. In New York there was neither the space to pile the stuff nearby nor the inclination to go looking for suburban pastures. Confronted with the need for an immediate solution, the Giuliani administration decided to reopen the city's recently retired Staten Island landfill—a famously unpopular dump more than twice the size of Central Park, which rises along a saltwater channel and is known (from the Dutch) as Fresh Kills. City trucks began rolling there the very first night, each carrying its dusty little load along a congested route through much of New York—by tunnel to Brooklyn and expressways across the borough, then over the Verrazano Narrows Bridge and down the length of Staten Island. One way alone, that trip could take two hours or more. What Corcoran proposed instead was using barges—equipment that Fresh Kills was already set up to accommodate. The use of barges would keep the Trade Center ruins off the roads, and limit the spread of noxious dust. More important, each barge was capable of carrying fifty to a hundred truckloads of debris, and the barges could be lashed into rafts of four before being pushed across the harbor and up the channels, twenty-six miles to Fresh Kills. The capacity of the barges was so large that with merely two loading points in Lower Manhattan, Corcoran believed he could keep the transportation of the

Holden and Burton responded tactically to the disaster, with no grand strategy in mind. At the police headquarters they discovered a telephone in a room off the temporary command center and began making calls. No one asked them to do this, or told them to stop.

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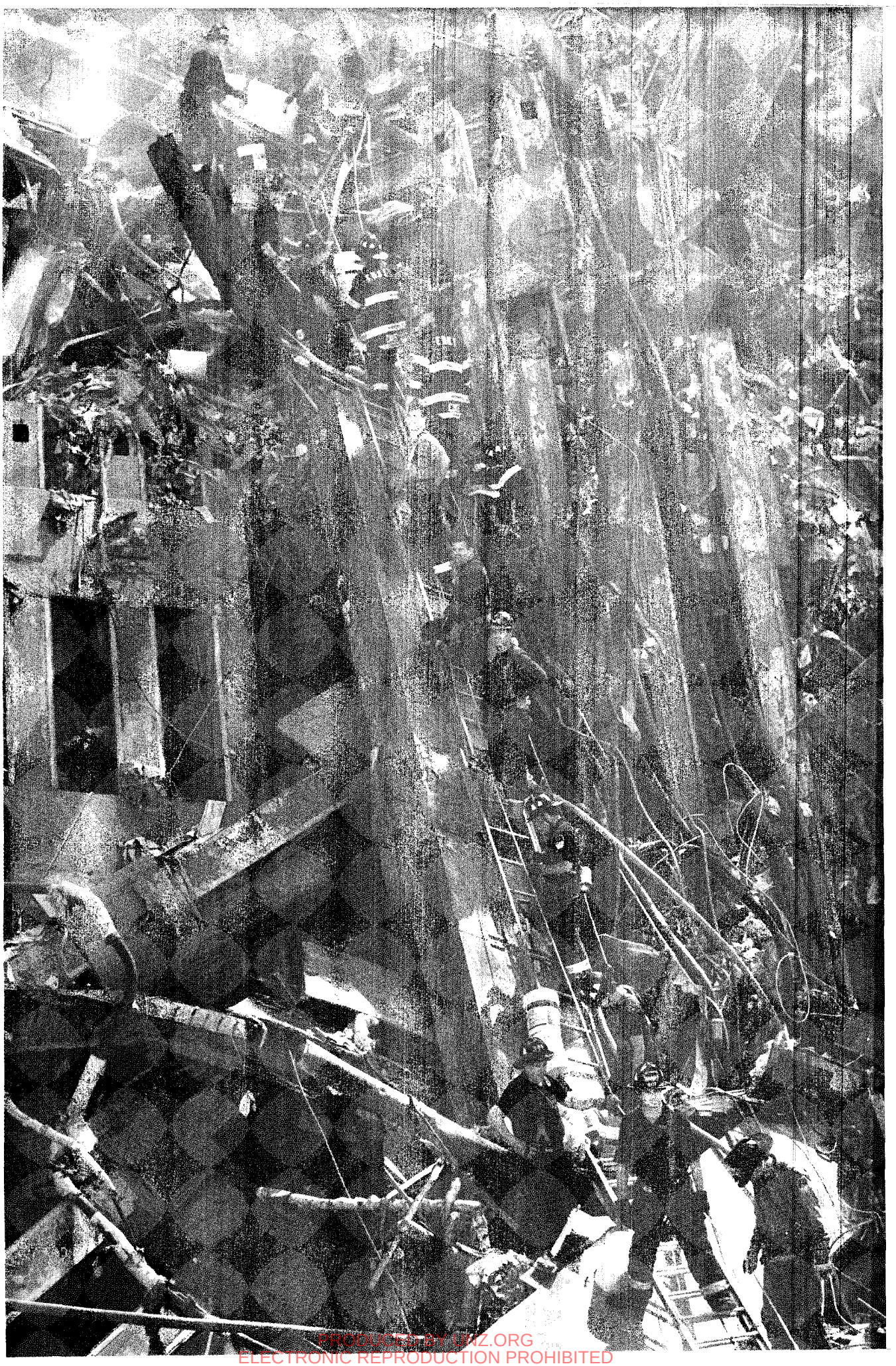

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debris from ever bottlenecking the efforts at the site. The loading points would have to be dredged to give the barges sufficient depth at low tide—and because of environmental regulations, this would require permits. But Corcoran had tugs and dredges standing by, and he could set up the operation fast.

For a deer caught in headlights, Burton was impressively decisive. It turned out that he had heard everything Corcoran had said, and he asked him to start setting up the barge operation right away, and to get back to him as soon as possible on the permit process. Nonetheless, Corcoran's memory of Burton's condition over those first few days was about right. Burton was functioning almost entirely without sleep, and reeling at the increasingly evident size and complexity of the project that he and Ken Holden seemed somehow to have taken on. With several thousand people missing inside the rubble, and volunteers still swarming across the burning pile, the pressure was relentless—and there was no end of it in sight. For reasons of personality, Holden and Burton had not had an easy relationship over the previous few years, but in the cafeteria now they forgot their differences and stood back-to-back, inventing solutions to problems as they arose, and sharing the simultaneous feelings of urgency and fatigue that characterize the battlefield experience. They were not the only ones. After a few days at PS 89, Corcoran, too, was walking around with a thousand-yard stare.

There was a significant moment after three days when Holden and Burton left the cafeteria crowds, and moved their operation one floor up to the kindergarten space—the incongruously childish classrooms, with their alphabet posters and diminutive chairs, from which the two men would direct the operation for months to come. The mood there remained as urgent as before, but because the clamor was reduced, a raw form of organization was able to take hold. It happened almost spontaneously. Holden and Burton assembled a small team from DDC headquarters in Queens, and supplemented it with a few outsiders—notably Peter Rinaldi, the Port Authority engineer, and a hard-nosed construction executive named Bill Cote, who had been Burton's roommate in college, and arrived now to serve as his right-hand man.

No one had time to ponder options and write plans. It was action, pure action, that was called for. Because of the need for clear communication, Burton instituted large twice-daily meetings in one of the kindergarten rooms—a simple, low-tech management system that proved to be particularly well suited to the apocalypse outside. Burton's reasoning was lucid as usual. To me he said, "The only way we can get control of the situation is by having everyone here. There's no time for distributing memos or waiting for the chain of command. Everybody has to hear what the problems are. The decisions have to be made, and everybody has to hear those decisions. We have to keep everybody moving in the same direction."

The men and women who crowded in every morning and every night were the envoys of their respective organizations. They came to the meetings in groups of two or three. At least twenty government agencies were represented (in an alphabet soup of acronyms), but primarily the participants were construction men, a few wearing suits and ties, but most in the industry standard of jeans or brown canvas coveralls, and steel-toed lace-up boots. They had helmets and hardhats and yellow Rite in the Rain all-weather field books, and by the second week they were carrying astonishing quantities of cell phones, beepers, and two-way radios—some of which, inevitably, had not been muted.

"Hey, Vinnie, where ya at?"

The participants sat on the windowsills and kindergarten desks, and crowded around a cluster of folding tables at the center of the room. The meetings were informal, and unusually frank. To encourage honest expression, electronic recording devices were banned, and the only minutes kept were of a sketchy, checklist variety—essentially just a schedule of problems to be solved. People were expected to propose solutions even at the risk of seeming foolish, and to swallow their pride when their ideas were dismissed or their performance was bluntly criticized. This happened often. Some of the participants were accomplished people with impressive résumés, but within the inner world of the Trade Center site it hardly mattered what they had done before. However temporarily, there was a new social contract here, which everyone seemed to understand. All that counted about anyone was what that person now could provide.

Mike Burton usually arrived last of all, along with the DDC team from the kindergarten room across the hall. He presided over the meetings perched on the seatback of a folding chair. He kept his yellow field book stuck into his waistband against the small of his back. He was efficient and to the point, and became known for making decisions fast and keeping the discussion on track; in one hour he could cover a lot of ground. Moreover, rather than getting worn down by the responsibilities, he seemed to be thriving on the stress, like a runner gaining confidence as he progressed. Part of that no doubt was purely physiological. Burton had found quarters nearby, and he was getting some sleep now, and growing accustomed to the rhythms of working eighteen hours a day. More significant, however, was the luck of suddenly finding himself in a starring role.

Burton had grown up in modest circumstances in a suburb called New City, just upriver from the city. His mother was a nurse. His father was a New York precinct cop, who after retirement became a security guard at a suburban hotel—a job he continues to hold today. Burton had one brother and two sisters. He was an unremarkable, inexperienced kid, lost somewhere in the middle of his class, and so unmotivated that he did not consider going to college until his parents told him late in high school that he would. He went off to Manhattan College, a Catholic school in the Bronx, because it was nearby, and he chose engineering there because he was never much of a reader. His roommate, Bill Cote, had a

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wider, more promising intellect, and they had good times together, but Burton seemed destined for an unexceptional life. Somehow then that changed: Burton's spirit did not necessarily widen in college, but he became alert to the possibilities of wealth and success. By graduation he wanted more than an engineering job could give him, and he went to work in the New York construction industry, and eventually earned an M.B.A. by taking night classes at a branch of Fordham University, in Manhattan. He worked hard, and began to make a good salary. It was the classic American story of a man's pulling himself up through sheer determination. When he went to work for the DDC, in 1996, it was not to take refuge, as so many do in government, but to gain experience in wielding power. He married a smart woman with a flourishing career in the telecommunications industry, and they had a child. By the time the Twin Towers fell, they were expecting a second child, and living in the wealthy Westchester community of Chappaqua, near the Clintons, in a beautifully remodeled schoolhouse—a showcase of elegant living that Burton had created largely with his own hands. They had a live-in nanny and a vacation house at a ski resort in Vermont. They chartered sailboats in the Caribbean and Greece. They scuba-dived, played golf, and toyed with the idea of learning to fly. They threw catered parties, and sipped fine wine. It was not always easy to have to answer to Ken Holden, a bureaucrat who lacked Burton's technical training and shared neither his values nor his drive. But that was a temporary condition, which Burton could soon leave behind. He was a confident man. He believed that every move he had made so far had been right. And if by his own measure the success he enjoyed still seemed a little thin, he was certainly off to a good start.

Now came this attack. Burton's reactions in the first few days were patriotic, compassionate, and completely unselfish; he had not the slightest thought of advancing his career. Nonetheless, by the end of the first week it was impossible to ignore that a great opportunity had arisen here. People already were calling him a "czar," and the press had picked up on the metaphor, and at the twice-daily meetings he was wielding more power than he had ever thought possible before. In immediate terms the experience was exhilarating. Burton had a hard time not showing it. He gave some self-aggrandizing interviews to the press, most notoriously to the premier heavy-construction journal, a publication called *Engineering News-Record*. Holden thought the resulting article implied that the City of New York had hired Bill Cote and selected the four main contractors essentially because they were Burton's friends. Holden called Burton into an empty kindergarten room and threatened to fire him if he ever gave such an interview again. Holden pointed out that there were other people who could handle the job. Burton acted contrite, and may truly have appreciated Holden's warning. He was not just a runner with stamina to spare. He was a mountain climber with a route in sight.

Holden was something very different, and much harder to categorize. He was a generalist, a reader, the product of a liberal life. He grew up in a big house in Connecticut with several brothers and sisters, and a father who was a doctor and a mother who was a nurse. They were relatively religious, and regularly invited the needy from their synagogue to share their meals. They contributed to charities. They contributed to the Democratic Party. They had a lot of books, some philosophical, many about the Holocaust. Upstairs in the house the children were allowed to scribble graffiti on the walls. Holden's father preferred almost any activity to watching TV. He called *Star Trek* "*Star Drek*," and limited the kids to one hour of TV a week. He liked to play with words. He could finish the *New York Times* crossword puzzle in five minutes flat. He had a weakness for sayings like "Blackberries are red when they're green." When Holden was six, he had no idea what this was supposed to mean. When he was eight, his father began to make him do fractions in his head. When he was ten, his father started giving him essay assignments on such subjects as "jams, jellies, and preserves" and "pirates, privateers, and buccaneers" and "Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown." These punishments fell on Holden through no fault of his own. When his parents vacationed in the Caribbean, he had to brief them with "Jamaica." When the neighbor's house burned down, he penned the classic "Spontaneous Combustion."

Holden escaped to a Jewish summer camp, which he enjoyed, and where as a teenager, at the end of his final year, he was caught in bed with a girl. To avoid expulsion he had to write yet another essay, this one on self-reform, but of course he did not feel repentant. His father was openly proud. Holden went off to Israel for a year, came back, graduated from high school, went to Columbia, floundered, worked as a bike messenger, went back to Israel, where he farmed and carried a gun, and finally returned to Columbia, ready to study. He earned a degree in history, and for several years afterward lived the bohemian life of New York, briefly working for Columbia's alumni association and controller's office and then going deeper into the city, as the manager of a SoHo print shop. He was anti-establishment, and he despised the military-industrial complex. He became a quasi-punk, and by the mid-eighties wore six earrings and had his hair in a modified Mohawk, dyed black. For additional effect he paid a tattoo artist on Long Island to engrave an image from the first Sex Pistols single onto his back. It was of two buses, one going to "Nowhere," the other to "Boredom." Years later, when his son, Teddy, would ask what the tattoo was about, it was hard to explain: this was from Daddy's nihilistic period, in the pre-dawn of history, not long ago. In 1986 Holden was fired from the print shop, unfairly, and he spent six rough months on unemployment, doing a lot of reading. Desperate for a job, he snagged a low-level administrative position with the city's Parks Department. Then something unexpected happened. He began to put in long hours and apply the considerable

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KEITH JONES: FATHER OF 2, GUARDIAN OF 300,000.

When Keith Jones started working part-time at UPS, he was a college student who dreamed of becoming a high-school guidance counselor. But pretty soon, his work ethic led to bigger opportunities. Keith got a chance to run a UPS distribution center. Then he opened a UPS facility in Hong Kong. And today, as Director of Corporate Health and Safety, he watches over 300,000 UPS employees. So, in a way, he got to be a guidance counselor after all. He just never dreamed he'd have so many to care for.

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power of his mind, learning such esoterica as the budgeting process, and producing top-quality work. Within the city's defiantly lethargic bureaucracy he soon stood out. Holden's co-workers demanded that he slack off, and he refused. After a year the brilliant and eccentric parks commissioner, Henry Stern, sent word that he wanted Holden to clean up his image: the message was, he wanted Holden's hair "in a box." Meanwhile, Holden had gotten involved temporarily with an alluring secretary, a woman from the wild side of life, who wore red boots and ended up working in a topless bar, and whose most recent husband, a biker, was threatening Holden with violence. So Holden was ready for a change in direction. He did not send Henry Stern his hair, but he cut it off, and dropped his earrings, and began his rapid rise. Such was the unlikely but necessary formation of the man who emerged from the Trade Center chaos to guide the recovery effort through wildly emotional times, and to keep the equally necessary ambitions of Mike Burton in line.

The two men could never have been friends, but in PS 89 it didn't much matter: they had a job to get done. Holden did not attend the twice-daily meetings but stayed in the background, across the hall in the headquarters room, where he worked the cell phones incessantly. The goal was narrowly defined at first—to bring in equipment and move out debris in order to help with the search. There was no golden moment in which Holden and Burton were placed definitively in charge. Rather, there was a shift of power in their direction that was never quite formalized and, indeed, was unjustified by bureaucratic logic or political considerations. The city's official and secret emergency plans, written before the attack, called for the Department of Sanitation to clean up after a building collapse. The woman who was involved in the writing of the latest versions—a mid-level official in the Office of Emergency Management—mentioned to one of the contractors a week after the Trade Center collapse that she still did not quite know what the DDC was. This may explain her attitude when she found her way to the headquarters room on the second floor of PS 89, where Holden and Burton were talking one afternoon during the first week. She came up to them and said, "Who told you to get involved?" Holden was exhausted. He said, "We're kind of busy now. Why don't you come back in six months and ask that question." Holden and Burton were having a particularly difficult time because of the growing suspicion that the ruins now contained only the dead. That possibility in no sense eased the urgency. The pile out there remained so vast and wild that no one could quite yet give up hope that in some undiscovered pocket people might still be trapped alive.

The hope remained, if only as a glimmer, when, three weeks into the effort, the south face of the foundation hole's huge and protective "slurry wall" began to bow inward under soil and groundwater pressure from the outside. The wall was a reinforced concrete shell—eighty feet deep from street level to the bottom of its bedrock socket, and 3,500 feet around—that enclosed the Trade Center's ten-acre foundation hole and for thirty years had kept it from being inundated by the tidal waters that permeated the surrounding ground. It had been built by an injection technique, in which a slushy bentonite slurry was used to stabilize a deep trench (essentially a mold) before a steel lattice was lowered into it and the bentonite was displaced by a heavier mixture of concrete. The result was a buried wall whose inner face was exposed one level at a time, and then drilled through and stabilized with steel tentacles, known as "tiebacks," that were anchored into bedrock under the nearby streets and buildings. The tiebacks were temporary devices, subject to corrosion, but they kept the slurry wall securely in place during the years of construction. After the foundation hole was completely dug, the six levels of basement structure that rose within it served to brace the slurry wall from the inside, and, as planned, the tiebacks were cut and abandoned. All this elaboration was necessary because of the unnatural permeability of the Trade Center site: although the surface looked as solid as the rest of Manhattan, the land there consisted mostly of loose Colonial-era fill (garbage, shipwrecks, rubble, and so forth) through which New York Harbor and the Hudson River continued to seep, rising at high tide to within five feet of West Street. In essence the Twin Towers had been built inside a rectangular cofferdam—and now that dam was in danger of breaking.

The consequences of a break were disturbing to contemplate. In the worst case tidal waters would flood into the foundation hole so fast that even the largest emergency pumps would be overwhelmed, and any survivors still trapped on the lowest levels would be drowned. Moreover, the waters would gush uncontrollably through the entrances to the twin PATH commuter-rail tubes—cast-iron tunnels that penetrated the slurry wall near the lowest (B-6) level, and sloped under the Hudson to a slightly lower station in New Jersey, at Exchange Place. Such a flood would perhaps not be as destructive as the cataclysmic surge feared from a gigantic rupture of the tubes themselves, but it would likely have the same sequential effect, spreading through the New Jersey rail connections and back into New York around Greenwich Village, where it would pour into the West Side subways and cause unimaginable havoc with the functioning of the city. Spurred into action by this very real possibility, the Port Authority was hurrying to seal the tubes with concrete plugs. The plugs were to be built with man-sized portals, giving access to the tubes but designed to be slammed shut in the case of inundation. When the slurry wall began to move, however, the work was still days from completion. For the Trade Center site itself there were other concerns as well. If the Port Authority did manage to plug the PATH tubes, and the slurry wall subsequently failed, the water would have nowhere to

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drain, and the foundation hole would fill up nearly to the level of the street—an immense and debris-choked bathtub seventy feet deep. Because of the chaos and instability of the pile, the effects of such an inundation were impossible to predict, but they would certainly include enormous new complications and risks, and would mean at the least that the recovery effort would end up being measured in years instead of months. Three weeks after the collapses, therefore, the sudden movement of the south slurry wall posed an urgent new concern.

It was not, however, a surprise. Indeed, the site's principal consulting engineer, Richard Tomasetti, had begun to worry about the slurry wall immediately on the evening of September 11, during the first walk-through with Burton and Holden, and that night he had enlisted the help of another renowned engineer, an underground specialist (known proudly as a "mole") named George Tamaro, who decades before had helped to oversee the construction of the slurry wall for the Port Authority. Tamaro was thought to understand the technology better than anyone else alive. He had prospered, and by now was the senior partner of the New York foundation firm Mueser Rutledge. At age sixty-four, he was a balding, avuncular man, urbane and charming, and as rumpled and self-deprecating as Tomasetti was dapper and proud. The two engineers entered the site together on September 12, and Tamaro, after surveying the ruins, quickly sketched a cartoonish map of the Trade Center's underground vulnerabilities for immediate distribution to the rescue operation—an outline of the slurry wall and also the location of four six-foot-diameter cooling intakes to the chiller plant, through which the Hudson would surge at high tide until the valves could be found and closed.

The destruction was of course impressive to Tamaro, who commented with his usual verve that Dante himself would have been unable to describe such a place. Miraculously, however, the slurry wall seemed to have held. The evidence for this was indirect, because conditions on the pile precluded inspection even by the firemen, but it was persuasive. One day after the terrorist attack the PATH tubes were serving as massive drains for the foundation hole, with New Jersey (as usual) on the receiving end. The north tube had completely flooded at the mid-river low point, and both tubes were flowing heavily with brackish water. The Port Authority had set up powerful emergency pumps at Exchange Place and was extracting up to 6,000 gallons a minute to keep the station from flooding. Nonetheless, on the scale of possibilities this was still pretty small stuff—a flow easily accounted for by the surges through the cooling intakes, minor leaks in the slurry wall, water-main breaks, and the multiple streams of river water (much of it pumped by Sam Melisi's boat) that were being directed against the fires. In relative terms, therefore, the slurry wall remained watertight.

Tamaro did not celebrate, in part because he realized that the wall's survival was by no means assured. Indeed, it seemed intuitively obvious that the reserves of luck had already been used up. The Twin Towers happened to have fallen with incredibly tight vertical focus, each floor on top of the one below, a pattern that had lessened the direct hits against the wall. More important, while demolishing the basement structures that normally braced the wall against the outside water pressure, the catastrophe had crammed the foundation hole with two times 110 floors of debris—a chaos of steel and concrete that coincidentally also worked to brace the wall. But that was the extent of the good news. As a bracing system, the rubble was frighteningly arbitrary, and judging from the constant collapses within the pile, it was also unstable. Now heavy equipment was heading toward the site, including huge self-propelled cranes (some, at 1,000 tons, the biggest ever seen in New York) that even without a shift in the debris could trigger a failure of the slurry wall, merely by burdening the soil nearby.

A flood resulting from a break in the slurry wall could spread through the New Jersey rail connections and back into New York around Greenwich Village, where it would pour into the West Side subways and cause unimaginable havoc with the functioning of the city.

Tamaro was worried for another reason, too. For all the unexpected support provided by the debris pile, there was an exception on the south side of the foundation hole, and it was huge—a yawning crater sixty feet deep that had been blown through the basement structures by the collapsing South Tower, leaving ledges of broken concrete slabs hanging from the slurry wall, which for most of its length along Liberty Street now stood completely unbraced. Every calculation of the pressures that were acting on the south wall indicated that it should have fallen inward soon after the South Tower's collapse—and it will forever be a mystery why it did not. Convinced that the wall sooner or later simply had to fail, Tamaro waited impatiently for nearly two weeks while access was cleared, until finally he was able to start into a two-sided plan of salvation. First, a string of "dewatering" wells would be drilled through the ruins of Liberty Street parallel to the slurry wall to reduce pressure from the outside. Second, the hard-driving crew from Tully would attack along the wall's front face with hundreds of truckloads of dirt, which they would dump and bulldoze into the

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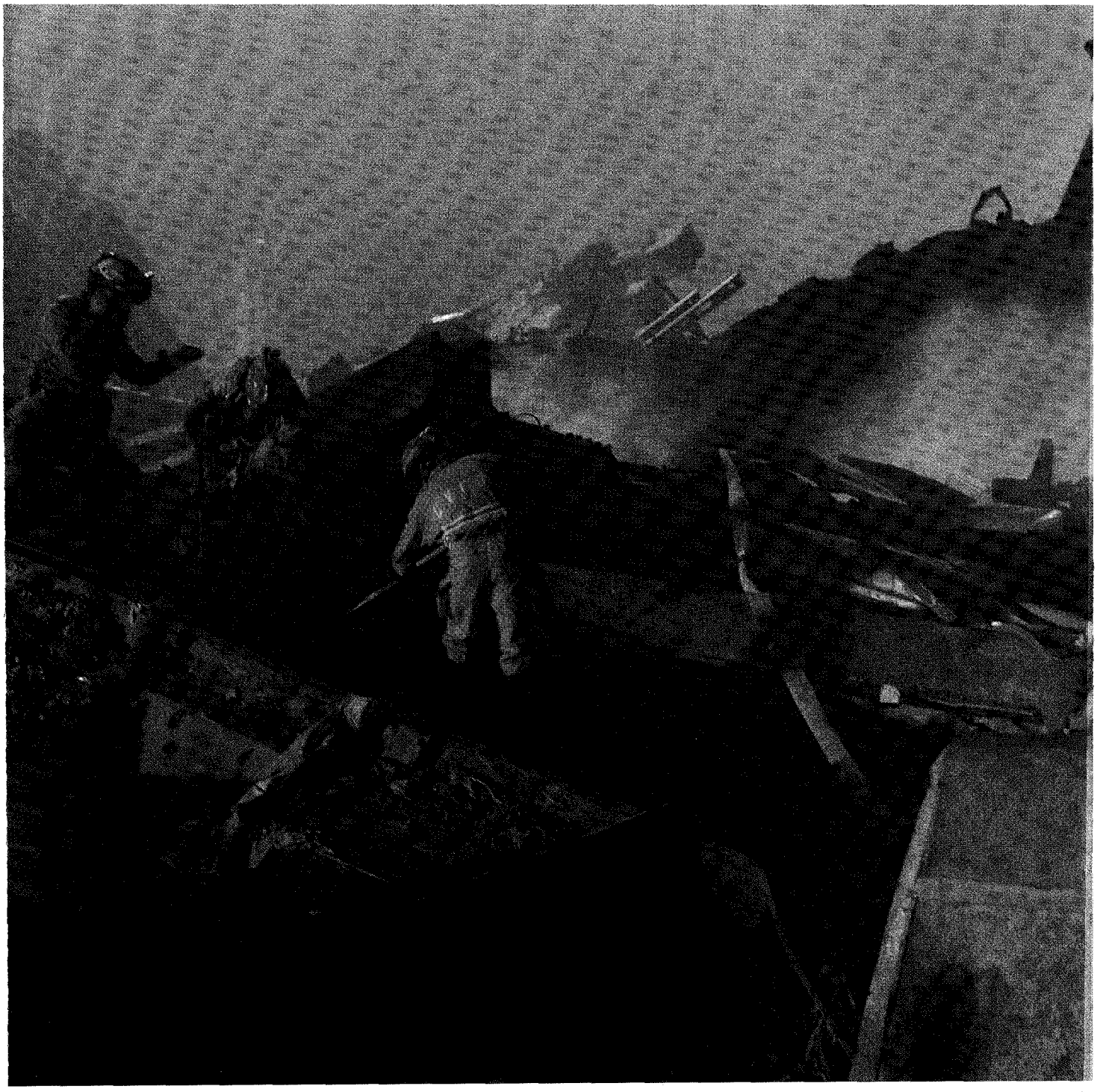

crater in an emergency "backfill" operation to buttress the wall from the inside. Tamaro knew he was involved in a race against time, and he was not at all confident that it could be won.

Nearly as great a concern was the west wall, which, though better braced by the ruins inside the foundation hole, was considered to be especially critical because of its proximity to the open waters of the Hudson River. A major failure there (whether spontaneous or triggered by a break of the vulnerable south wall) could produce the sort of immediate deluge that would threaten the workers on the pile. Once the backfill operation was under way, Tamaro decided to send an engineering team through an unexplored area of the underground in the ruins below the Marriott hotel, and along the west wall just north of the crater. Its purpose was to check the integrity of the structure, and particularly to look for heavy leaks, the existence of which could serve as an early warning of collapse. The team included, among others, the laconic fireman John O'Connell, as usual with cigar, and also Tamaro's duo of front-line engineers—the brainy and ironic Andrew Pontecorvo

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and his giant Ecuadorian partner, the voluble Pablo Lopez. I went along too, following Lopez through the tight spots. We climbed down through a hole in the surface of the pile, descended a ruined stairway beneath the hotel, and for several hours worked carefully through a dim and broken labyrinth, retreating occasionally to the filtered daylight along the jagged inner edges of the crater before returning into the darkness and continuing to probe through collapsed passageways toward the west wall. Lopez was the man who finally got through, half a floor up from the black floodwaters at the bottom of the foundation hole. He found the slurry wall on the far side of a twisted steel fire door, in a long, narrow space full of the sound of falling water. We edged along it, playing flashlight beams into the streams that were cascading down from overhead and squirting under pressure through the rusting old tieback connections.

Lopez said, "This is nothing. What we're looking for is Niagara Falls." He used a variety of terms for the leaks, mostly dismissive. Some he called "drips," some "pissers," and some, with just the beginning of admiration, "real criers." On that trip he found only one leak worthy of a compliment. It arced from the wall about forty feet below river level, at a rate that Lopez estimated to be 100 gallons a minute. He called it "a genuine gusher." It did not, however, qualify as an indication of real trouble on the west wall. When later that day he got a worried radio call about a new leak on the exposed south wall, he diagnosed it as just another pisser, and didn't even bother to go see it. He radioed, "Here, take an aspirin, and call me in the morning if it still hurts." Judging from the silence on the other end, the message was clear.

Lopez just naturally thought big. At one point, as he supervised the punching of a "mouse hole" through a ruined slab, I mentioned that his "mouse" was about the size of a truck. He said, "Bro'! This is New York! So it's a rat hole!" He was thirty-eight years old. Sometimes he wore a moustache, sometimes the scrub of a beard. He'd had two wives and two children, and he lived where he had grown up, in a tough part of Washington Heights, in Upper Manhattan. His father had been a teamster, his mother a test-tube cleaner in a lab. He attended Catholic schools, and was an altar boy, but lost interest in religion. When he was in high school, he wanted to get a part-time job. His mother, who was the strong one in the family, said, "You stick to your studies. The minute you get a taste of money, you're going to want to buy a car. After that there is no end." Lopez eventually learned to drive, but he never did see the need to buy a car. He was such a city boy that when he rode the subway to college in the Bronx, he thought it was like taking a train to the country. The destination was Manhattan College, the same institution attended by Peter Rinaldi, Mike Burton, Bill Cote, Richard Tomasetti, George Tamaro, and, for that matter, Rudolph Giuliani. There were so many Manhattan College graduates at the Trade Center site that people referred to the work there as a school project, and someone posted an alumni sign-in sheet outside one of the kindergarten rooms at PS 89, which rapidly filled up. Pablo Lopez studied at Manhattan College on a full scholarship. He told me he was given the scholarship because he had applied to study engineering and the admissions people figured they wouldn't have to pay out much money, because no Ecuadorian from Washington Heights would be able to maintain the required grades. Eventually he earned a master's degree, and taught there, too. He liked to joke that he had played the system for a fool. He was proud of

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his humble background, and his connection to the streets.

One day at the Trade Center site he went for dinner at the Red Cross feeding station, and he had salmon for the first time in his life. I asked him later if he liked it, and he said sure, it was fine. He was not a fussy eater. The next day he returned to the feeding station, and for lack of choice had salmon again. He wolfed the fish down without giving it much thought. On the third day, after emerging from the underground, he and I went there together—and this time again the offering was salmon, only stuffed. Lopez decided to speak up. To the woman behind the counter, one of the Red Cross volunteers, he said, "Hey, don't you guys have anything like hamburgers?" His tone was affable. He was unshaven. He had a hardhat and a respirator. His hands were washed (a requirement for getting in), but otherwise he was streaked with the Trade Center's stains—its mud and ever-present dust.

She smiled at him. "Don't you know salmon is good for you?"

"Yeah, but I'm a poor guy. I'm used to ground beef."

She kept smiling, and said, "I'll put in a special order."

Lopez half believed her. The Red Cross volunteers were unusually gentle with people in the food lines—presumably because they had been told that conditions on the pile were traumatic, and they believed that the workers required comfort. But when Lopez went back on the fourth day, the choice again was salmon. He'd had enough. On the fifth day he left the Trade Center and strolled down Chambers Street to a dinner at McDonald's. He said it was the best meal he'd had in ages. He did not mean to exaggerate. We had been three weeks at the site, but it felt much longer.

And then, early one morning before dawn, under the harsh white illumination of emergency lighting, an ominous crack spread through the ground along Liberty Street, because the south slurry wall had begun to fail. During the days that followed, the Trade Center site teetered on the edge of a second great disaster. Peter Rinaldi was the first to report the trouble to Mike Burton. The crack lay thirty feet south of the wall, and was two inches wide. Though it didn't look like much yet, Rinaldi believed it meant the worst. He was extremely calm about this, in the style of a grown man talking about problems with his car. Burton, too, was calm—though obviously very concerned. At the morning meeting he said, "It may not mean anything, but the something it could mean would not be a good thing." People laughed. There was other business to take care of too. For instance: There had been a near fatality the night before on the pile, when a cable snapped and dropped a sixteen-ton beam into a hole that a fireman had just climbed out of—so people needed to be more careful about suspended loads. There had been a fire in Bankers Trust, ignited by the sparks of a cutting torch—so firemen would have to accompany the cutters there now. A piece of landing gear had been found on the roof of 90 West Street, and the owner wanted it off—but the FBI had not released it yet, so there was no point in trying to retrieve it. There was dangerous mold in the ruins of the Borders bookstore—so people needed to wear their respirators if they went inside. The EPA was insisting that workers had to use the new boot wash-down stations before leaving the site—so this would have to be done. The FBI, on the other hand, was insisting that the loads on the departing trucks could not be washed down, because they might contain "evidence"—but this seemed so out of touch that certainly for now the directive could be ignored. And finally, the Department of Health was demanding an effort to fight the growing population of rodents at the site—so who here had always wanted to be a rat king? Again, people laughed. Burton had exhibited the appropriate Trade Center aplomb.

Afterward Burton donned a hardhat and went with Rinaldi directly to the south wall. The crack was lengthening and widening; it seemed to be deep, too, because with a flashlight you could not see to the bottom. Rinaldi ventured that the crack represented a "classic shear failure," the back of a wedge of soil that was dropping and filling the space created as the top of the wall crept inward. The movement was confirmed by survey points—and it amounted so far to about four inches. At the first sign of trouble earlier that morning Rinaldi had briefly stopped the backfill operation in the crater, worried that it might be inflicting rotational forces, inducing the failure by pushing the base of the wall outward; but after rethinking the problem he had decided this was unlikely and had asked that the operation continue. He had also considered the possibility that the drilling under way for the dewatering wells, which paradoxically required the use of water around the drill bit, might actually have recharged the groundwater in the area, increasing the pressure on the wall. Burton himself did not bother to theorize. He immediately ordered all equipment, including the drilling rigs, away from the wall, and asked the dewatering contractor to activate the five wells already in place, despite the lack of a permit. Then he ordered an all-out acceleration of the backfill operation.

The days passed in a blur of roaring machinery and impromptu meetings in the smoke and dust of the pile. Tully rushed in truckload after truckload of fresh dirt, and bulldozed it hurriedly against the wall. But the wall continued its glacial advance. It was inexorable. Again suspicion arose that the backfill itself was causing the trouble—not by inducing rotation but more simply, by burdening the wall's attached ledges and slowly dragging the structure down. George Tamaro visited frequently to ponder the scene. On the third day of the crisis, with no improvement in sight, Burton said, "George, what assurance do you have that the fill is not causing the collapse?"

Tamaro said, "Why don't you ask me when I'm going to die?"

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Rinaldi said, "The problem is the wall shouldn't even be standing."

Tomasetti was there too, well dressed as usual in a suit and good shoes. He said, "The question is, why is the collapse happening so slowly? The fill does seem to be having some positive effects." But he didn't seem at all sure of that.

By this time the top of the wall had moved six inches and was continuing to drift. In New Jersey the Port Authority had just completed the PATH tube plugs and now had the option, if necessary, of closing the Trade Center's drain. Tamaro thought it might have to be done. He said, "I don't want to be an alarmist, but . . ."

Burton said, "We know from the PA there's no increase in the outflow." This meant there was no increase in the inflow, either.

Tamaro said, "Yet."

Indeed, the pumping was accelerating in New Jersey, and the water was turning more brackish, as it would if the slurry wall were failing, allowing in the tidal waters—but word of this took a while to arrive.

Tomasetti said, "Can't we anchor the wall?"

Tamaro answered, "No. How? Struts? Tied off to what?"

Rinaldi said, "There's no clean, easy solution."

The earth shuddered underfoot, as structures collapsed far below. Burton did not allow it to distract him. He assumed a position that became familiar through the worst of the crisis, standing by the drifting wall with his arms folded across his narrow chest and a frown of concentration on his face. His reputation was on the line: if the wall collapsed and later it turned out that the backfill operation itself was the culprit, he would be pilloried for years to come. Word arrived that people at City Hall were requiring the sort of assurances that no one could give them. Holden was running defense, trying to steady their nerves. Privately Holden was pessimistic. His reputation, too, was on the line. To me he said, "We're caught with our finger in a dike." But he was too shrewd a manager to second-guess Burton now. Here was a case in which Burton's faith in his own decisions might work to everyone's favor. He did not waffle as others did. He just said, "Keep the backfill going." He was very tough. People thought he was secure with himself, but that was not quite it. He had a climber's need to prevail. And this time, once again, he turned out to be right. There was no great skill involved. The dirt kept piling higher. On the fourth day the movement of the slurry wall began to slow, and on the fifth, having drifted an incredible twelve inches without failing, the wall finally stopped. Burton allowed himself a beer.

By then a month had gone by since the attack, and twenty-eight days had passed without a single victim's being found alive. The sense of urgency remained strong, but people knew what they now began privately to express—that the effort amounted only to a search for the dead. It was going to be sad, frustrating work, and all the more disheartening because it seemed clear that many of the victims must have been obliterated without a trace, atomized by the collapses or cremated in the infernos that ensued. Indeed, by the end of the unbuilding and recovery effort, this past summer, fewer than half of the people presumed killed had been found and identified—and many of those only through the most ambitious program of DNA matching ever attempted in the United States.

Nothing about that search was easy. Even when they were whole and fresh, the corpses did not wait tidily on the surface to be collected. They lay crumpled and deeply intertwined with the debris. Near the top of the pile, where the compaction was less, intact bodies were uncovered by diesel grapplers lifting heavy beams, only to prove difficult to extricate from the tangled debris. Firemen formed most of the recovery teams, and they directed the procedures. Affected no doubt by the isolation of the site as much as by their grief, they treated their own dead with a reverence not afforded others. Because they controlled the emotion-laden retrieval process for the entire site, their attitude bred factionalism on the pile, and in October led to an argument over the body of a Port Authority policeman that foreshadowed more serious confrontations to come. The policeman was discovered in the ruins of the Trade Center's plaza, and although his body was intact, one leg was pinned under a chaos of heavy steel that would obviously take hours to excavate. Because of the instability of the ruins, the excavation would also require shutting down other recovery operations in a wide area at the center of the site. The firemen who were gathering around had a better idea: they would free the body instead by cutting off the leg. Amputation may have been the right decision to make, but it was seen by the Port Authority police officers who were arriving on the scene as a solution based on the firemen's relative disregard for non-firemen, and their desire at all costs to keep searching for their own. This was probably unfair. But the police pointed out correctly that no dead fireman would have had his leg cut off. Still, the firemen were unwilling to change their minds. The dispute never got physical, but it took a while to resolve, and it was not forgotten. In the end the Port Authority police won, and the center of the site was shut down for eight hours while they extracted their man. The shutdown became an act of tribute in itself. But increasingly within the inner world of the Trade Center site the dead were seen as members of different tribes.

The nature of the search for human remains necessarily underwent changes as the geography of the pile itself did. But a basic template for the process was established early. Normally there were seventy-five firemen on recovery duty at a time, supplemented by small numbers of police officers. They came in on one-month tours, and worked twelve-hour shifts according to a schedule that gave them every third day off, resulting in a pattern by which each searcher

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worked a total of twenty days. Though a few firemen signed on for multiple tours, most did not. This created a visible cycle at the site, between the overeager and incautious searching by teams at the start of their tours and the calmer, more efficient work that was performed later. Sam Melisi was one of the few who were present the entire time, on a relentless schedule of fourteen hours a day, six days a week, and in his self-effacing way he helped to steady the newcomers and teach them the necessary skills.

It was not complicated work, but it was tedious and grim, and because of the heavy equipment and unstable conditions on the pile, it was unsafe. For the most part what it required was patience. The searchers stood hour after hour in small groups by each of the diesel excavators that, one bite at a time, were tearing apart the ruins. They carried rakes and shovels, which they used to stir and probe the loose debris. As the operation matured, it settled into a two-stage inspection process, by which the searchers carefully examined each fresh load on the pile itself, and then took a second look at a debris-transfer point that was established at the southeast corner. The goal was to intercept remains at the earliest possible moment, on the pile in order to keep from scattering them and hindering the already difficult problem of identification, and at the debris-transfer point to spare the dead from what was seen as the indignity of being trucked and barged to the landfill at Fresh Kills—where, however, a third and particularly painstaking inspection was carried out.

The search imposed a reversal of normal sentiments about the dead, so the toughest days were those in which none were found. The firemen concentrated their efforts first on the debris where their colleagues were likely to lie, and as expected, they found pockets in the ruins of the stairwells in which the dead were piled on top of one another. But the site never yielded the large concentration of victims—"the mother lode," Sam Melisi called it—that everyone was hoping for. Most of the dead were instead found "in dribs and drabs," as a discouraged fireman told me—meaning in ones and twos, and distributed all over the place. The best predictor turned out to be the nature of the materials being excavated—at one extreme the intensely compacted and burned-through ruins that hardly merited a glance, and at the other extreme the relatively loose jumbles of heavy steel, where intact bodies continued to be found until nearly the end. I remember a startling moment late in December in the "donut hole" crater of Building Six, when a grappler lifted a beam and uncovered a man in a suit and tie who had fallen from Cantor Fitzgerald, in the North Tower, and was sitting upright, now somewhat shriveled but whole, with his wallet in his pocket. His condition was surprising particularly because he had been sitting almost in the open for a few months, and had not been entombed in the pumicelike Trade Center powder that helped to preserve others. Generally, the bodies that endured best were those of firemen, because they were wrapped in equipment and heavy clothing, whereas the most devastated were those of women, whose stockings and blouses offered poor protection during the collapses and after death. But, of course, decay began to set in for all of them from the first day, and the unseasonably warm winter weather sped the process along. By January the intact bodies being found were falling apart, with heads in particular becoming detached, and at one of the morning meetings an official from the Medical Examiner's Office of the City of New York made a private plea to take greater care with the exhumations, because of the obvious undesirability of having to identify the same victim multiple times.

But most of the human remains were already in pieces; the force of the aircraft impacts and of the ensuing collapses had seen to that. Indeed, of the 1,209 victims identified within the first ten months of investigation by the Medical Examiner's Office, only 293 were nearly whole bodies, and the others were identified from among 19,693 parts. Of course, some of these parts were clustered, and some were collected at Fresh Kills, but the great majority of them were excavated, mapped, and tagged one by one in the chaos of the pile. Many of the parts found during the first few weeks were easy to distinguish. I saw bones scoured by fire, and a section of vertebrae with tissue hanging off, and a single severed arm with no sign of other remains nearby. It was the weight of the parts that made them seem most real. After the arm was placed in the standard red biohazard bag, it stretched the plastic as a fireman lugged it to an all-terrain "Gator," trying to hold it away from his body to keep it from bumping into his thigh.

After the first few weeks work at the site settled into a certain rhythm. The fires continued to burn, water was poured onto the pile, the backfill operation delivered dirt to the south side to shore up the slurry wall, and the contractors began pushing in roads of finely ground asphalt, known as millings, which they laid on top of the rubble. All this and the passage of time meant that the scattered body parts began to look like lumpy cakes, and similar to the ordinary debris into which they were mixed. The only way to spot them was to stand practically on top of the places where the grapplers were working. The placement of the night lighting was very important: without multiple angles of illumination shadows were created; and in those shadows entire lives could be missed. The safety officials at the site announced an exclusion zone of fifty feet around the machines, a rule so obviously impractical that people assumed it was merely for the record: Here are your orders (now please ignore them). Sam Melisi said, "Fifty feet? You might as well be two hundred feet away with binoculars. You might as well not even go into the pile." He himself frequently reminded the other searchers about the dangers of working near these machines. But in practice it was usually a subtlety that gave the body parts away—a shred

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of clothing, the texture of striated muscle, a certain brownish color that was just a shade out of place in the gray-black mud of the pile. More important still, there was the smell—and you had to be close, with your respirator off, to pick it up. The human nose seemed to be correctly calibrated for the work on the pile, largely because of its insensitivity. Only once in my memory, in early November, was a large area enveloped in the stench of death. Otherwise the smell of rotting meat meant that a remnant lay practically underfoot, and with a rake or a shovel could quickly be found. Because of the Trade Center's restaurants and cafeterias, not every remnant was human. Word came from the forensic anthropologists working off the site that among the recovered materials were cuts of beef and chicken, and a significant number of hot dogs. This caused hardly a comment on the pile, where the difficulty of distinguishing one kind of meat from another was accepted by the recovery teams matter-of-factly.

At the receiving end of their effort, in a building uptown known informally as the Dead House, sat a master of the matter-of-fact, the Medical Examiner's principal liaison to the Trade Center site. He was David Schomburg, a bald, middle-aged man who had been the butt of predictably macabre jokes of the "Igor" variety, and who indeed was pale, but who also possessed a lively intelligence and a necessarily unsqueamish approach to death. Though he rarely spoke at the meetings at PS 89, Schomburg turned out to be an impressive monologist. I went to see him one winter day, and asked him about the normal functioning of the Medical Examiner's Office. He looked me in the eyes and began to talk. What he said, in shortened form, was "We are an independent finder of fact. Our duty is to take and conduct independent investigations of deaths under our jurisdiction. We serve all of New York City. We have jurisdiction over anyone who has a death arising out of casualty or injury. Trauma, for example. What you have to understand is there is a difference between *cause* of death, *mechanism* of death, and *manner* of death. Cause of death is the disease and/or injury that is responsible for the mechanism of death. Mechanism of death is the pathophysiologic means whereby the disease and/or injury exerts its lethality. Manner of death is a classification system—and it's like death is a multiple-choice event. We have six manners to choose from. One, we have natural death, which means it's caused exclusively by disease. Two, we have accidental death, which means it's a death arising out of an injury that came from an unplanned sequence of events: basically, we learned what 'accident' was the second time we spilled the milk at the breakfast table. 'Gee, Mom. It was an accident.' Three, we have homicide, which is death at the hands of another with degree of intent. Four, we have suicide, which is death at one's own hands with degree of intent; self-homicide, if you would. Five, we have therapeutic complication, which is a little complicated, but basically the easiest way to understand it is the 'but for' logic test, as in 'But for the therapy, the patient would be alive.' Six, we have undetermined, which is when we cannot decide the manner of death with reasonable medical certainty."

He took a breath. "Overall, our mission is to determine the cause of death and certify the dead with their manner of death. I guess that's why people think the Medical Examiner's Office is just the Dead House. In one door, autopsy, and out you go with a certificate. But it's more complicated than that. There are parts of the death certificate that are opinion, and there are parts that are fact and legally binding. One of the legally binding parts is, Who died? Where and when? It's our responsibility as certifiers to say that this is in fact the person who died. And we do that via a variety of ways. Sometimes it's easy. If you were to drop dead and people know you, they could look at you and say, 'Yeah, this is my friend Bill!' However, there are times when we have to realize that people are kind of like bananas. You buy a bunch of bananas, they sit on the counter, you eat a few, and there's always a couple that hang around, get a little freckled, and pretty soon they're not too appetizing. You stick them in the refrigerator to make banana bread later, and they get shoved to the back. Several months go by, you discover them back there, 'What the heck is this?' It's a rotted banana, and it looks like every other rotted banana. People are a lot like that. Left dead, unattended in warm environments, you can't tell them apart. Also, injury can take and disfigure or remove people's identifying features, make it very difficult. So we have to rely on other means—fingerprints, dental records, x-rays that were taken prior to death, and DNA analysis. It's embarrassing to have somebody you certify dead show up on the beach in the south of France enjoying the insurance money with a girlfriend. Or boyfriend. We routinely process twenty thousand deaths a year. But when it comes to IDs we generally don't rely on just one method. We're kind of fussy. That gets us to our involvement in the World Trade Center, which is interesting because our approach has been different. We felt early on it was unfair

The only way to spot the body parts was to stand practically on top of the places where the grapplers were working. The placement of the night lighting was very important: without multiple angles of illumination shadows were created; and in those shadows entire lives could be missed.

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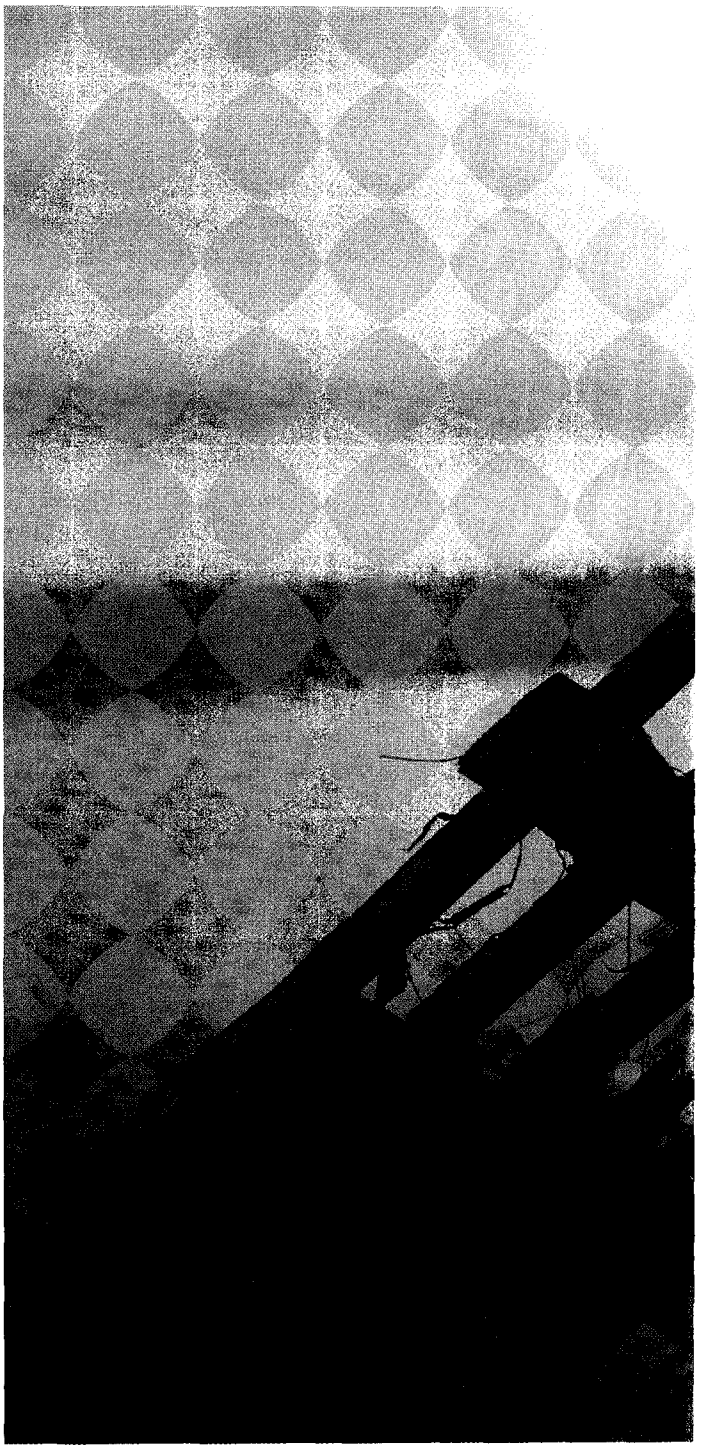
to make families wait years to have somebody declared dead, and that at some point we should be allowed to issue a death certificate even though we may not have been able to confirm the presence of a body. So we have actually two channels of certification going on. We have the real one, where we find somebody, identify who they are, and issue a death certificate. And we have this other side, which is a death certificate based on court declaration. And then when we do find somebody, we replace that [court] certificate. It's a long, tedious process, but the goal is still to identify as much of the material as we can and return it to families."

What Schomburg meant, in Dead House terms, was that he, too, was improvising in response to the Trade Center attacks, and pioneering new ground. We walked through the uptown processing facility to the end of the line, a large white tent where the remains were stored in twenty refrigerated trailers, and we stood there and talked. The discussion was clinical at first. It was about procedure, forensics, and physical conditions on the pile. For both of us it was all by that time rather routine. But then I asked him a question for which there was no simple answer: What is it in the bewilderment of loss that drives people to want so desperately to retrieve the bodies of their dead and, in the extremes of this case, to retrieve those bodies even after they are unrecognizable and torn to shreds? Schomburg was a specialist in death, and deeply involved in precisely that process, but even he was unsure. He said, "It's everywhere, I'd guess. The body becomes like the ultimate symbol. It represents the person we knew, the person we loved. And when that body no longer reacts—when it's dead—in our minds, now we have to accept that this is so. We've seen it with our own eyes." True enough, I thought, but if that was the extent of it, if that was the justification for such an enormous effort of retrieval, there was a legitimate question of how far a healthy society should go along. Schomburg seemed to have anticipated my doubt. He said, "Or maybe it's just that every culture, every society, has its own kind of funeral rite."



The next afternoon it snowed, and by evening the site was transformed, covered by a tentative blanket of white, though muddy still along the access roads, and black amid the hot debris near the North Tower ruins, where the pile still smoked and vented steam. The workers had been anticipating the challenge of snow nearly from the start, and they spread salt to keep the trucks from slipping, and eagerly maintained the pace of the excavation. The snow continued to fall, filling the air under the emergency lights with a density of crystals. It was a Saturday night, and out beyond the perimeter Manhattan was returning to a normal life, and no doubt enjoying the weather. People here were enjoying the weather too, and profoundly, because it deepened the sense of inhabiting a special world. I ran into Sam Melisi on the pile near a recovery team, standing next to freshly turned debris; he looked like a northern woodsman with snow on his moustache. Pablo Lopez came over and complained about the cold as if it was an affront to his heritage. Late in the night Bill Cote and I walked the site; for a while we simply stood and gazed at the ruins. They seemed impossibly beautiful. In the morning four inches covered the pile, smoothing its surface. I followed footpaths across the slippery steel, and broke a trail high into the ruins of Building Six for a better view. Below, the footpaths wove like little veins across the terrain, and joined the main access roads at the center, where the heavy equipment was

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hard at work. I figured a thousand people must have been there overnight, tearing into the debris with their ferocious machines, but such was the scale of the scene that in the fresh snow now the ruins seemed hardly to have been visited. We'd come a distance nonetheless. The attack was still vivid in people's minds, but it was drifting into a category of memory assigned firmly to the long ago. I perched on the edge of a fallen steel column, and for a while did nothing more than let time pass. One of the grappler operators, a man I knew, came up and sat beside me for a cigarette break. He was taken by the sight of the ruins, and said that it calmed him strangely. Neither of us spent words on it. There was something about the snow—perhaps its very indifference to human events—that provided perspective on the efforts under way. Maybe it was just that we had become residents of such an intense private place. After so many weeks, whatever calm the snow could provide was welcome.

William Langewiesche is a national correspondent for The Atlantic. *This three-part* Atlantic *series will be published later this year as a book,* American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center, *by North Point Press, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*

Coming in October, "American Ground," Part Three: "The Dance of the Dinosaurs"

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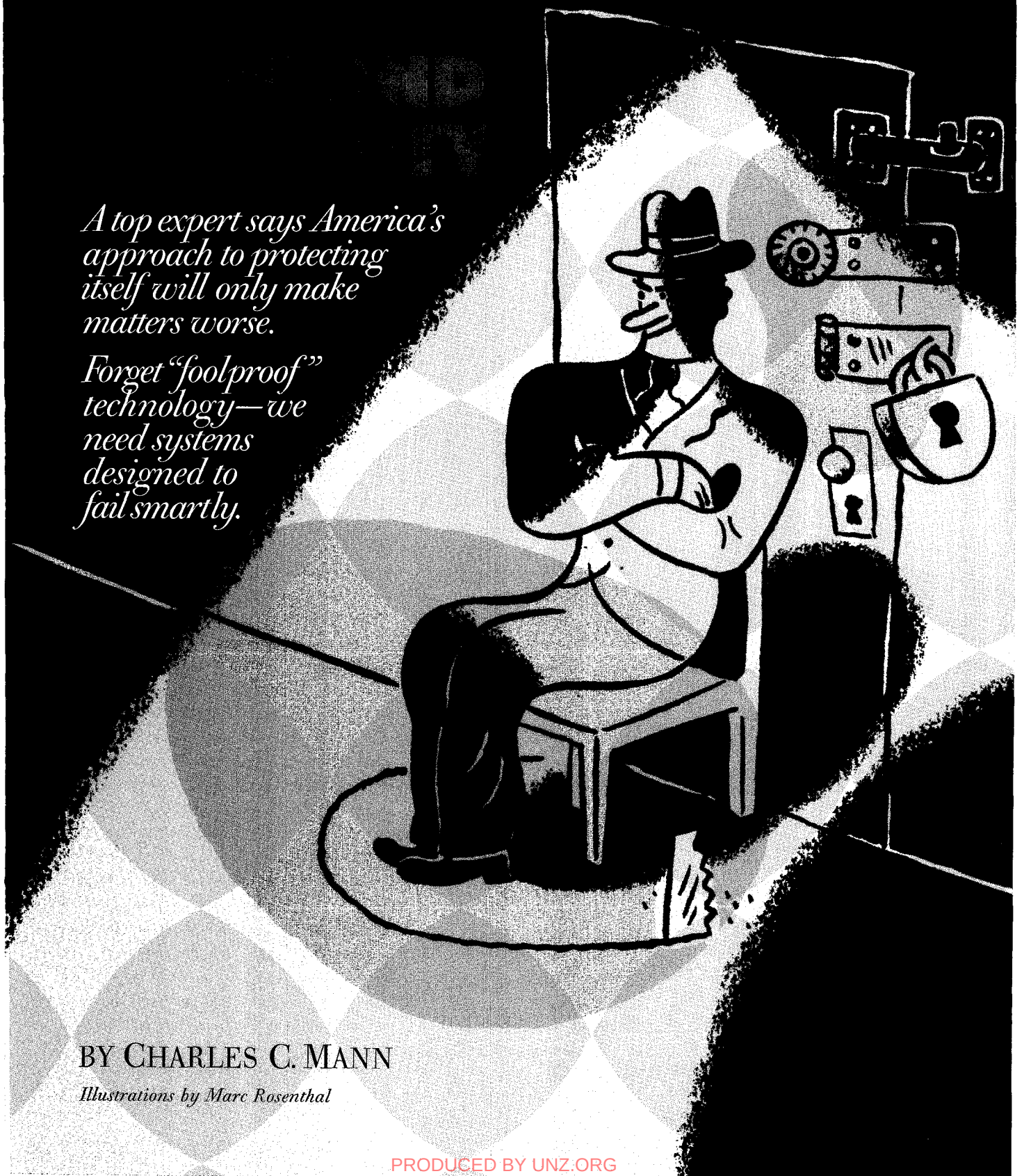

A top expert says America's approach to protecting itself will only make matters worse.

Forget "foolproof" technology—we need systems designed to fail smartly.

BY CHARLES C. MANN

Illustrations by Marc Rosenthal

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HOMELAND INSECURITY

- *To stop the rampant theft of expensive cars, manufacturers in the 1990s began to make ignitions very difficult to hot-wire. This reduced the likelihood that cars would be stolen from parking lots—but apparently contributed to the sudden appearance of a new and more dangerous crime, carjacking.*
- *After a vote against management Vivendi Universal announced earlier this year that its electronic shareholder-voting system, which it had adopted to tabulate votes efficiently and securely, had been broken into by hackers. Because the new system eliminated the old paper ballots, recounting the votes—or even independently verifying that the attack had occurred—was impossible.*
- *To help merchants verify and protect the identity of their customers, marketing firms and financial institutions have created large computerized databases of personal information: Social Security numbers, credit-card numbers, telephone numbers, home addresses, and the like. With these databases being increasingly interconnected by means of the Internet, they have become irresistible targets for criminals. From 1995 to 2000 the incidence of identity theft tripled.*

As was often the case, Bruce Schneier was thinking about a really terrible idea. We were driving around the suburban-industrial wasteland south of San Francisco, on our way to a corporate presentation, while Schneier looked for something to eat not purveyed by a chain restaurant. This was important to Schneier, who in addition to being America's best-known ex-cryptographer is a food writer for an alternative newspaper in Minneapolis, where he lives. Initially he had been sure that in the crazy ethnic salad of Silicon Valley it would be impossible not to find someplace of culinary interest—a Libyan burger stop, a Hmong bagelry, a Szechuan taco stand. But as the rented car swept toward the vast, amoeboid office complex that was our destination, his faith slowly crumbled. Bowing to reality, he parked in front of a nondescript sandwich shop, disappointment evident on his face.

Schneier is a slight, busy man with a dark, full, closely cropped beard. Until a few years ago he was best known as a prominent creator of codes and ciphers; his book *Applied Cryptography* (1993) is a classic in the field. But despite his success he virtually abandoned cryptography in 1999 and co-founded a company named Counterpane Internet Security. Counterpane has spent considerable sums on advanced engineering, but at heart the company is dedicated to bringing one of the oldest forms of policing—the cop on the beat—to the digital realm. Aided by high-tech sensors, human guards at Counterpane patrol computer networks, helping corporations and governments to keep their secrets secret. In a world that is both ever more interconnected and full of malice, this is a task of considerable difficulty and great importance. It is also what Schneier long believed cryptography would do—which brings us back to his terrible idea.

"Pornography!" he exclaimed. If the rise of the Internet has shown anything, it is that huge numbers of middle-class, middle-management types like to look at dirty pictures on computer screens. A good way to steal the corporate or government secrets these middle managers are privy to, Schneier said, would be to set up a pornographic Web site. The Web site would be free, but visitors would have to register to download the naughty bits. Registration would involve creating a password—and here Schneier's deep-set blue eyes widened mischievously.

People have trouble with passwords. The idea is to have a random string of letters, numbers, and symbols that is easy to remember. Alas, random strings are by their nature hard to remember, so people use bad but easy-to-remember pass-

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words, such as "hello" and "password." (A survey last year of 1,200 British office workers found that almost half chose their own name, the name of a pet, or that of a family member as a password; others based their passwords on the names Darth Vader and Homer Simpson.) Moreover, computer users can't keep different passwords straight, so they use the same bad passwords for all their accounts.

Many of his corporate porn surfers, Schneier predicted, would use for the dirty Web site the same password they used at work. Not only that, many users would surf to the porn site on the fast Internet connection at the office. The operators of Schneier's nefarious site would thus learn that, say, "Joesmith," who accessed the Web site from Anybusiness.com, used the password "JoeS." By trying to log on at Anybusiness.com as "Joesmith," they could learn whether "JoeS" was also the password into Joesmith's corporate account. Often it would be.

"In six months you'd be able to break into Fortune 500 companies and government agencies all over the world," Schneier said, chewing his nondescript meal. "It would work! It would work—that's the awful thing."

During the 1990s Schneier was a field marshal in the disheveled army of computer geeks, mathematicians, civil-liberties activists, and libertarian wackos that—in a series of bitter lawsuits that came to be known as the Crypto Wars—asserted the right of the U.S. citizenry to use the cryptographic equivalent of kryptonite: ciphers so powerful they cannot be broken by any government, no matter how long and hard it tries. Like his fellows, he believed that "strong crypto," as these ciphers are known, would forever guarantee the privacy and security of information—something that in the Information Age would be vital to people's lives. "It is insufficient to protect ourselves with laws," he wrote in *Applied Cryptography*. "We need to protect ourselves with mathematics."

Schneier's side won the battle as the nineties came to a close. But by that time he had realized that he was fighting the wrong war. Crypto was not enough to guarantee privacy and security. Failures occurred all the time—which was what Schneier's terrible idea demonstrated. No matter what kind of technological safeguards an organization uses, its secrets will never be safe while its employees are sending their passwords, however unwittingly, to pornographers—or to anyone else outside the organization.

The Parable of the Dirty Web Site illustrates part of what became the thesis of Schneier's most recent book, *Secrets and Lies* (2000): The way people think about security, especially security on computer networks, is almost always wrong. All too often planners seek technological cure-alls, when such security measures at best limit risks to acceptable levels. In particular, the consequences of going wrong—and all these systems go wrong sometimes—are rarely considered. For these reasons Schneier believes that most of the security measures envisioned after September 11 will be ineffective, and that some will make Americans *less* safe.

It is now a year since the World Trade Center was destroyed. Legislators, the law-enforcement community, and the Bush Administration are embroiled in an essential debate over the measures necessary to prevent future attacks. To armor-plate the nation's security they increasingly look to the most powerful technology available: retina, iris, and fingerprint scanners; "smart" driver's licenses and visas that incorporate anti-counterfeiting chips; digital surveillance of public places with face-recognition software; huge centralized databases that use data-mining routines to sniff out hidden terrorists. Some of these measures have already been mandated by Congress, and others are in the pipeline. State and local agencies around the nation are adopting their own schemes. More mandates and more schemes will surely follow.

Schneier is hardly against technology—he's the sort of person who immediately cases public areas for outlets to recharge the batteries in his laptop, phone, and

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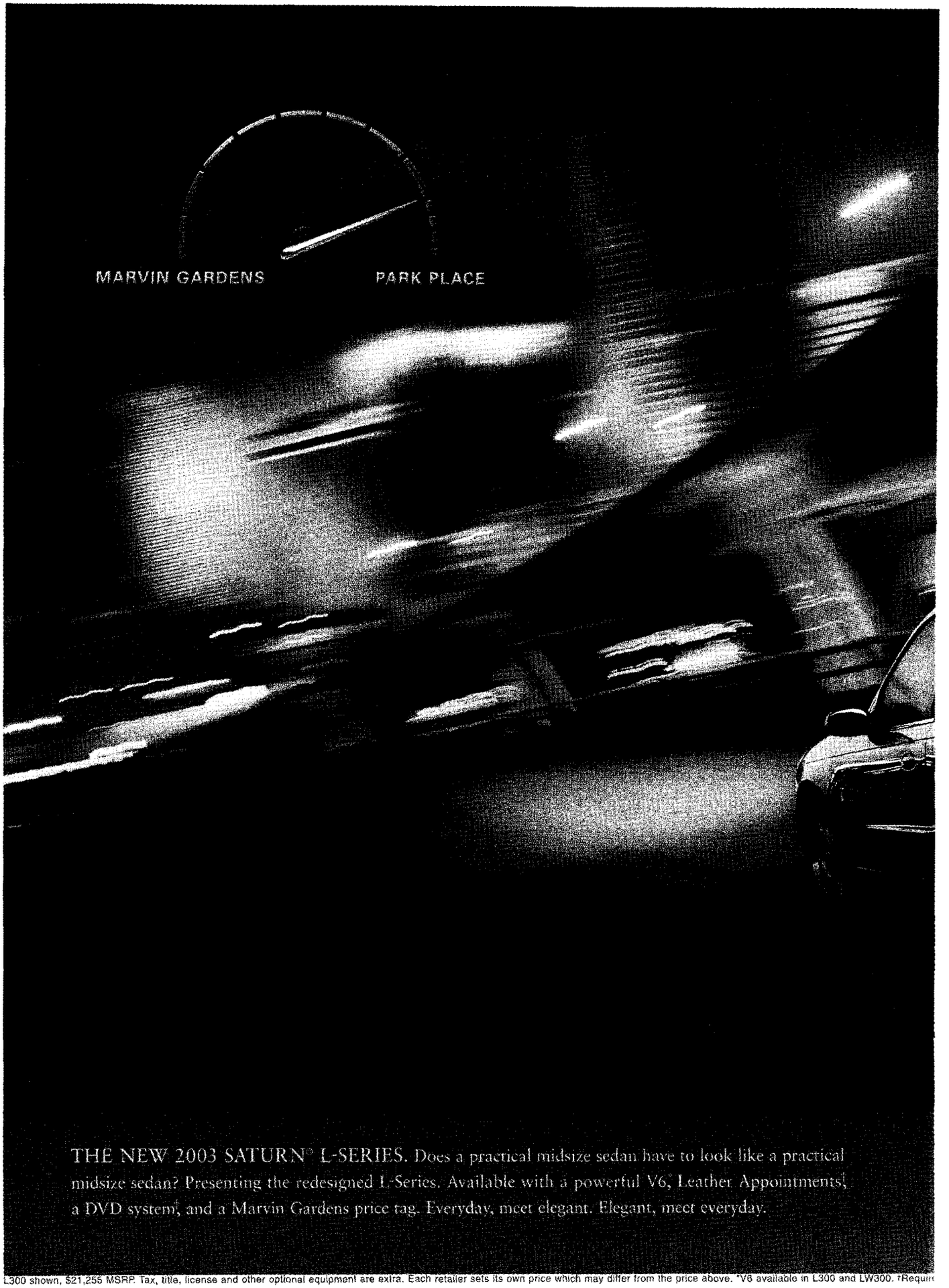

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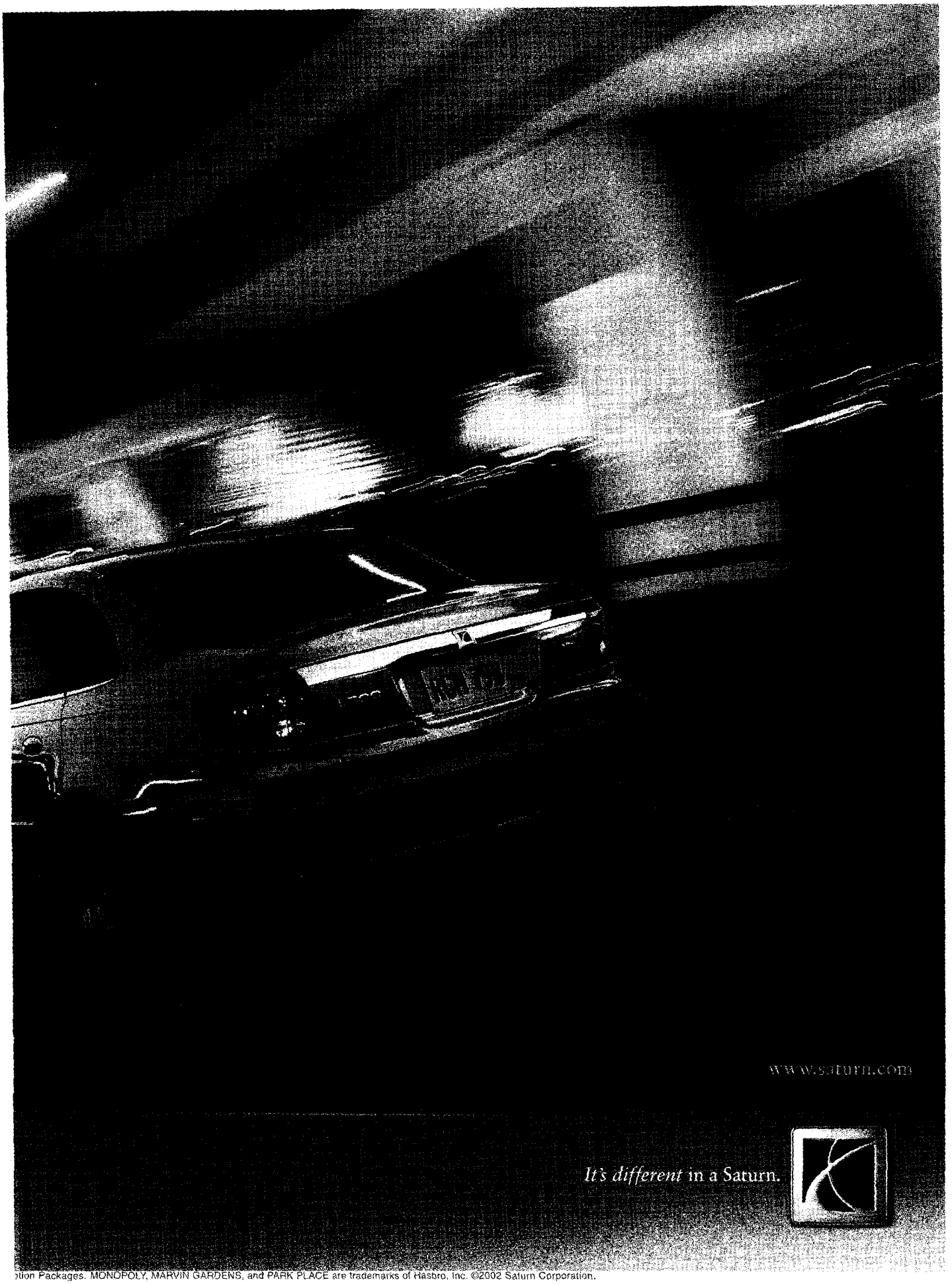

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other electronic prostheses. "But if you think technology can solve your security problems," he says, "then you don't understand the problems and you don't understand the technology." Indeed, he regards the national push for a high-tech salve for security anxieties as a reprise of his own early and erroneous beliefs about the transforming power of strong crypto. The new technologies have enormous capacities, but their advocates have not realized that the most critical aspect of a security measure is not how well it works but how well it fails.

The way people think about security, especially security on computer networks, is almost always wrong. All too often planners seek cures, magic bullets to make problems vanish. Most of the security measures envisioned after September 11 will be ineffective—and some will even make Americans less safe than they would be without them.

The Crypto Wars

If mathematicians from the 1970s were suddenly transported through time to the present, they would be happily surprised by developments such as the proofs to Kepler's conjecture (proposed in 1611, confirmed in 1998) and to Fermat's last theorem (1637, 1994). But they would be absolutely astonished by the RSA Conference, the world's biggest trade show for cryptographers. Sponsored by the cryptography firm RSA Security, the conferences are attended by as many as 10,000 cryptographers, computer scientists, network managers, and digital-security professionals. What would amaze past mathematicians is not just the number of conferences but that they exist at all.

Cryptology is a specialized branch of mathematics with some computer science thrown in. As recently as the 1970s there were no cryptology courses in university mathematics or computer-science departments; nor were there crypto textbooks, crypto journals, or crypto software. There was no private crypto industry, let alone venture-capitalized crypto start-ups giving away key rings at trade shows (*crypto key* rings—techno-humor). Cryptography, the practice of cryptology, was the province of a tiny cadre of obsessed amateurs, the National Security Agency, and the NSA's counterparts abroad. Now it is a multibillion-dollar field with applications in almost every commercial arena.

As one of the people who helped to bring this change about, Schneier is always invited to speak at RSA conferences. Every time, the room is too small, and overflow crowds, eager to hear their favorite guru, force the session into a larger venue, which is what happened when I saw him speak at an RSA conference in San Francisco's Moscone Center last year. There was applause from the hundreds of seated cryptophiles when Schneier mounted the stage, and more applause from the throng standing in the aisles and exits when he apologized for the lack of seating capacity. He was there to talk about the state of computer security, he said. It was as bad as ever, maybe getting worse.

In the past security officers were usually terse ex-military types who wore holsters and brush cuts. But as computers have become both attackers' chief targets and their chief weapons, a new generation of security professionals has emerged, drawn from the ranks of engineering and computer science. Many of the new guys look like people the old guard would have wanted to arrest, and Schneier is no exception. Although he is a co-founder of a successful company, he sometimes wears scuffed black shoes and pants with a wavering press line; he gathers his thinning hair into a straggly ponytail. Ties, for the most part, are not an issue. Schneier's style marks him as a true nerd—someone who knows the potential, both good and bad, of technology, which in our technocentric era is an asset.

Schneier was raised in Brooklyn. He got a B.S. in physics from the University of Rochester in 1985 and an M.S. in computer science from American University two years later. Until 1991 he worked for the Department of Defense, where he did things he won't discuss. Lots of kids are intrigued by codes and ciphers, but Schneier was surely one of the few to ask his father, a lawyer and a judge, to write secret messages for him to analyze. On his first visit to a voting booth, with his mother, he tried to figure out how she could cheat and vote twice. He didn't actually want her to vote twice—he just wanted, as he says, to "game the system."

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Unsurprisingly, someone so interested in figuring out the secrets of manipulating the system fell in love with the systems for manipulating secrets. Schneier's childhood years, as it happened, were a good time to become intrigued by cryptography—the best time in history, in fact. In 1976 two researchers at Stanford University invented an entirely new type of encryption, public-key encryption, which abruptly woke up the entire field.

Public-key encryption is complicated in detail but simple in outline. All ciphers employ mathematical procedures called algorithms to transform messages from their original form into an unreadable jumble. (Cryptographers work with ciphers and not codes, which are spy-movie-style lists of prearranged substitutes for letters, words, or phrases—"meet at the theater" for "attack at nightfall.") Most ciphers use secret keys: mathematical values that plug into the algorithm. Breaking a cipher means figuring out the key. In a kind of mathematical sleight of hand, public-key encryption encodes messages with keys that can be published openly and decodes them with different keys that stay secret and are effectively impossible to break using today's technology. (A more complete explanation of public-key encryption is on *The Atlantic*'s Web site, www.theatlantic.com.)

The best-known public-key algorithm is the RSA algorithm, whose name comes from the initials of the three mathematicians who invented it. RSA keys are created by manipulating big prime numbers. If the private decoding RSA key is properly chosen, guessing it necessarily involves factoring a very large number into its constituent primes, something for which no mathematician has ever devised an adequate shortcut. Even if demented government agents spent a trillion dollars on custom factoring computers, Schneier has estimated, the sun would likely go nova before they cracked a message enciphered with a public key of sufficient length.

Schneier and other technophiles grasped early how important computer networks would become to daily life. They also understood that those networks were dreadfully insecure. Strong crypto, in their view, was an answer of almost magical efficacy. Even federal officials believed that strong crypto would Change Everything Forever—except they thought the change would be for the worse. Strong encryption "jeopardizes the public safety and national security of this country," Louis Freeh, then the director of the (famously computer-challenged) Federal Bureau of Investigation, told Congress in 1995. "Drug cartels, terrorists, and kidnappers will use telephones and other communications media with impunity knowing that their conversations are immune" from wiretaps.

The Crypto Wars erupted in 1991, when Washington attempted to limit the spread of strong crypto. Schneier testified before Congress against restrictions on encryption, campaigned for crypto freedom on the Internet, co-wrote an influential report on the technical snarls awaiting federal plans to control cryptographic protocols, and rallied 75,000 crypto fans to the cause in his free monthly e-mail newsletter, *Crypto-Gram* (www.counterpane.com/crypto-gram.html). Most important, he wrote *Applied Cryptography*, the first-ever comprehensive guide to the practice of cryptology.

Washington lost the wars in 1999, when an appellate court ruled that restrictions on cryptography were illegal, because crypto algorithms were a form of speech and thus covered by the First Amendment. After the ruling the FBI and the NSA more or less surrendered. In the sudden silence the dazed combatants surveyed the battleground. Crypto had become widely available, and it had indeed fallen into unsavory hands. But the results were different from what either side had expected.

As the crypto aficionados had envisioned, software companies inserted crypto into their products. On the "Tools" menu in Microsoft Outlook, for example, "encrypt" is an option. And encryption became big business, as part of the infrastructure for e-commerce—it is the little padlock that appears in the corner

Why the Maginot Line Failed

In fact, the Maginot Line, the chain of fortifications on France's border with Germany, was indicative neither of despair about defeating Germany nor of thought mired in the past. It was instead evidence of faith that technology could substitute for manpower. It was a forerunner of the strategic bomber, the guided missile, and the "smart bomb." The same faith led to France's building tanks with thicker armor and bigger guns than German tanks had, deploying immensely larger quantities of mobile big guns, and above all committing to maintain a continuous line—that is, advancing or retreating in such coordination as to prevent an enemy from establishing a salient from which it could cut off a French unit from supplies and reinforcements. (Today, military strategists call this "force protection.") But having machines do the work of men and putting emphasis on minimal loss of life carried a price in slowed-down reaction times and lessened initiative for battlefield commanders.

—*Ernest R. May,* Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France *(2000)*

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of Net surfers' browsers when they buy books at Amazon.com, signifying that credit-card numbers are being enciphered. But encryption is rarely used by the citizenry it was supposed to protect and empower. Cryptophiles, Schneier among them, had been so enraptured by the possibilities of uncrackable ciphers that they forgot they were living in a world in which people can't program VCRs. Inescapably, an encrypted message is harder to send than an unencrypted one, if only because of the effort involved in using all the extra software. So few people use encryption software that most companies have stopped selling it to individuals.

Among the few who do use crypto are human-rights activists living under dictatorships. But, just as the FBI feared, terrorists, child pornographers, and the Mafia use it too. Yet crypto has not protected any of them. As an example, Schneier points to the case of Nicodemo Scarfo, who the FBI believed was being groomed to take over a gambling operation in New Jersey. Agents surreptitiously searched his office in 1999 and discovered that he was that rarity, a gangster nerd. On his computer was the long-awaited nightmare for law enforcement: a crucial document scrambled by strong encryption software. Rather than sit by, the FBI installed a "keystroke logger" on Scarfo's machine. The logger recorded the decrypting key—or, more precisely, the passphrase Scarfo used to generate that key—as he typed it in, and gained access to his incriminating files. Scarfo pleaded guilty to charges of running an illegal gambling business on February 28 of this year.

Schneier was not surprised by this demonstration of the impotence of cryptography. Just after the Crypto Wars ended, he had begun writing a follow-up to *Applied Cryptography*. But this time Schneier, a fluent writer, was blocked—he couldn't make himself extol strong crypto as a security panacea. As Schneier put it in *Secrets and Lies*, the very different book he eventually did write, he had been portraying cryptography—in his speeches, in his congressional testimony, in *Applied Cryptography*—as "a kind of magic security dust that [people] could sprinkle over their software and make it secure." It was not. Nothing could be. Humiliatingly, Schneier discovered that, as a friend wrote him, "the world was full of bad security systems designed by people who read *Applied Cryptography*."

In retrospect he says, "Crypto solved the wrong problem." Ciphers scramble messages and documents, preventing them from being read while, say, they are transmitted on the Internet. But the strongest crypto is gossamer protection if malevolent people have access to the computers on the other end. Encrypting transactions on the Internet, the Purdue computer scientist Eugene Spafford has remarked, "is the equivalent of arranging an armored car to deliver credit-card information from someone living in a cardboard box to someone living on a park bench."

To effectively seize control of Scarfo's computer, FBI agents had to break into his office and physically alter his machine. Such black-bag jobs are ever less necessary, because the rise of networks and the Internet means that computers can be controlled remotely, without their operators' knowledge. Huge computer databases may be useful, but they also become tempting targets for criminals and terrorists. So do home computers, even if they are connected only intermittently to the Web. Hackers look for vulnerable machines, using software that scans thousands of Net connections at once. This vulnerability, Schneier came to think, is the real security issue.

The Worm in the Machine

Buffer overflows (sometimes called *stack smashing*) are the most common form of security vulnerability in the last ten years. They're also the easiest to exploit; more attacks are the result of buffer overflows than any other problem ...

Computers store everything, programs and data, in memory. If the computer asks a user for an 8-character password and receives a 200-character password, those extra characters may overwrite some other area in memory. (They're not supposed to—that's the bug.) If it is just the right area of memory, and we overwrite it with just the right characters, we can change a "deny connection" instruction to an "allow access" command or even get our own code executed.

The Morris worm is probably the most famous overflow-bug exploit. It exploited a buffer overflow in the UNIX fingerd program. It's supposed to be a benign program, returning the identity of a user to whomever asks. This program accepted as input a variable that is supposed to contain the identity of the user. Unfortunately, the fingerd program never limited the size of the input. Input larger than 512 bytes overflowed the buffer, and Morris wrote a specific large input that allowed his rogue program to [install and run] itself ... Over 6,000 servers crashed as a result; at the time [in 1988] that was about 10 percent of the Internet.

Skilled programming can prevent this kind of attack. The program can truncate the password at 8 characters, so those extra 192 characters never get written into memory anywhere ... The problem is that with any piece of modern, large, complex code, there are just too many places where buffer overflows are possible ... It's very difficult to guarantee that there are no overflow problems, even if you take the time to check. The larger and more complex the code is, the more likely the attack.

Windows 2000 has somewhere between 35 and 60 million lines of code, and no one outside the programming team has ever seen them.

—Bruce Schneier, *Secrets and Lies: Digital Security in a Networked World* (2000)

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when the temptation was
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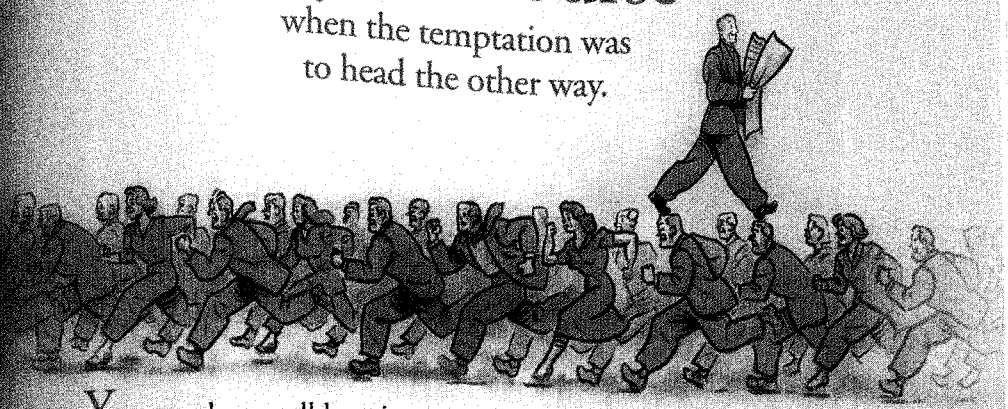

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With this realization he closed Counterpane Systems, his five-person crypto-consulting company in Chicago, in 1999. He revamped it and reopened immediately in Silicon Valley with a new name, Counterpane Internet Security, and a new idea—one that relied on old-fashioned methods. Counterpane would still keep data secret. But the lessons of the Crypto Wars had given Schneier a different vision of how to do that—a vision that has considerable relevance for a nation attempting to prevent terrorist crimes.

Where Schneier had sought one overarching technical fix, hard experience had taught him the quest was illusory. Indeed, yielding to the American penchant for all-in-one high-tech solutions can make us *less* safe—especially when it leads to enormous databases full of confidential information. Secrecy is important, of course, but it is also a trap. The more secrets necessary to a security system, the more vulnerable it becomes.

The moral, Schneier came to believe, is that security measures are characterized less by their success than by their manner of failure. All security systems eventually miscarry in one way or another. But when this happens to the good ones, they stretch and sag before breaking, each component failure leaving the whole as unaffected as possible.

To forestall attacks, security systems need to be small-scale, redundant, and compartmentalized. Rather than large, sweeping programs, they should be carefully crafted mosaics, each piece aimed at a specific weakness. The federal government and the airlines are spending millions of dollars, Schneier points out, on systems that screen every passenger to keep knives and weapons out of planes. But what matters most is keeping dangerous passengers out of airline cockpits, which can be accomplished by reinforcing the door. Similarly, it is seldom necessary to gather large amounts of additional information, because in modern societies people leave wide audit trails. The problem is sifting through the already existing mountain of data. Calls for heavy monitoring and record-keeping are thus usually a mistake. ("Broad surveillance is a mark of bad security," Schneier wrote in a recent *Crypto-Gram*.)

To halt attacks once they start, security measures must avoid being subject to single points of failure. Computer networks are particularly vulnerable: once hackers bypass the firewall, the whole system is often open for exploitation. Because every security measure in every system can be broken or gotten around, failure must be incorporated into the design. No single failure should compromise the normal functioning of the entire system or, worse, add to the gravity of the initial breach. Finally, and most important, decisions need to be made by people at close range—and the responsibility needs to be given explicitly to people, not computers.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that these principles are playing any role in the debate in the Administration, Congress, and the media about how to protect the nation. Indeed, in the argument over policy and principle almost no one seems to be paying attention to the practicalities of security—a lapse that Schneier, like other security professionals, finds as incomprehensible as it is dangerous.

Stealing Your Thumb

A couple of months after September 11, I flew from Seattle to Los Angeles to meet Schneier. As I was checking in at Sea-Tac Airport, someone ran through the metal detector and disappeared onto the little subway that runs among the terminals. Although the authorities quickly identified the miscreant, a concession stand worker, they still had to empty all the terminals and re-screen everyone in the airport, including passengers who had already boarded planes. Masses of unhappy passengers stretched back hundreds of feet from the checkpoints. Planes by the dozen sat waiting at the gates. I called Schneier on a cell phone to report my delay. I had to shout over the noise of all the other people on their cell phones making similar calls. "What a mess," Schneier said. "The problem with airport security, you know, is that it fails badly."

For a moment I couldn't make sense of this gnomic utterance. Then I realized he meant that when something goes wrong with security, the system should

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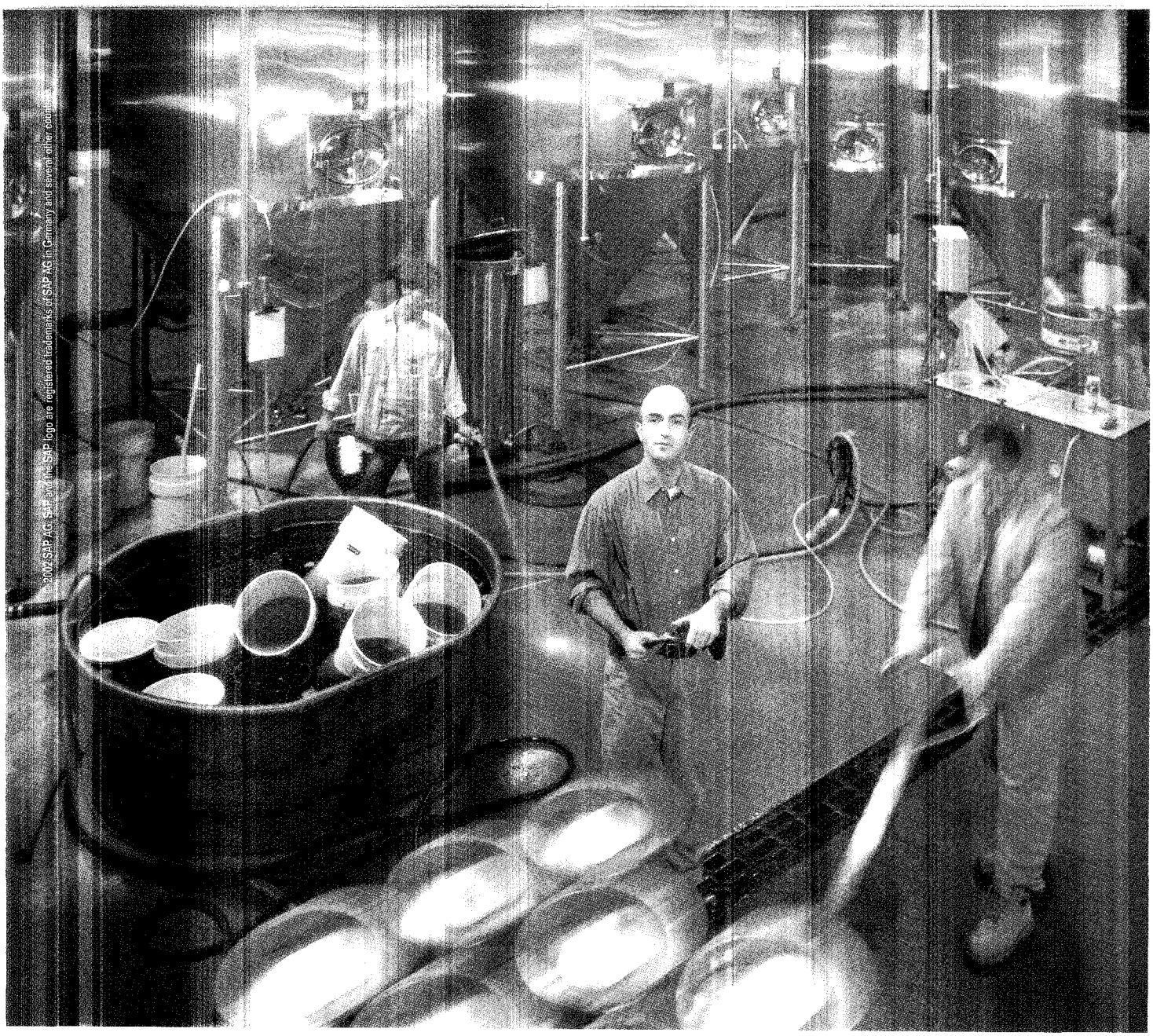

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recover well. In Seattle a single slip-up shut down the entire airport, which delayed flights across the nation. Sea-Tac, Schneier told me on the phone, had no adequate way to contain the damage from a breakdown—such as a button installed near the x-ray machines to stop the subway, so that idiots who bolt from checkpoints cannot disappear into another terminal. The shutdown would inconvenience subway riders, but not as much as being forced to go through security again after a wait of several hours. An even better idea would be to place the x-ray machines at the departure gates, as some are in Europe, in order to scan each group of passengers closely and minimize inconvenience to the whole airport if a risk is detected—or if a machine or a guard fails.

Schneier was in Los Angeles for two reasons. He was to speak to ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, which controls the "domain name system" of Internet addresses. It is Schneier's belief that attacks on the address database are the best means of taking down the Internet. He also wanted to review Ginza Sushi-Ko, perhaps the nation's most exclusive restaurant, for the food column he writes with his wife, Karen Cooper.

Minutes after my delayed arrival Schneier had with characteristic celerity packed himself and me into a taxi. The restaurant was in a shopping mall in Beverly Hills that was disguised to look like a collection of nineteenth-century Italian villas. By the time Schneier strode into the tiny lobby, he had picked up the thread of our airport discussion. Failing badly, he told me, was something he had been forced to spend time thinking about.

In his technophilic exuberance he had been seduced by the promise of public-key encryption. But ultimately Schneier observed that even strong crypto fails badly. When something bypasses it, as the keystroke logger did with Nicodemo Scarfo's encryption, it provides no protection at all. The moral, Schneier came to believe, is that security measures are characterized less by their manner of success than by their manner of failure. All security systems eventually miscarry. But when this happens to the good ones, they stretch and sag before breaking, each component failure leaving the whole as unaffected as possible. Engineers call such failure-tolerant systems "ductile." One way to capture much of what Schneier told me is to say that he believes that when possible, security schemes should be designed to maximize ductility, whereas they often maximize strength.

Since September 11 the government has been calling for a new security infrastructure—one that employs advanced technology to protect the citizenry and track down malefactors. Already the USA PATRIOT Act, which Congress passed in October, mandates the establishment of a "cross-agency, cross-platform electronic system ... to confirm the identity" of visa applicants, along with a "highly secure network" for financial-crime data and "secure information sharing systems" to link other, previously separate databases. Pending legislation demands that the Attorney General employ "technology including, but not limited to, electronic fingerprinting, face recognition, and retinal scan technology." The proposed Department of Homeland Security is intended to oversee a "national research and development enterprise for homeland security comparable in emphasis and scope to that which has supported the national security community for more than fifty years"—a domestic version of the high-tech R&D juggernaut that produced stealth bombers, smart weapons, and anti-missile defense.

Iris, retina, and fingerprint scanners; hand-geometry assayers; remote video-network surveillance; face-recognition software; smart cards with custom identification chips; decompressive baggage checkers that vacuum-extract minute chemical samples from inside suitcases; tiny radio implants beneath the skin that continually broadcast people's identification codes; pulsed fast-neutron analysis of shipping containers ("so precise," according to one manufacturer, "it can determine within inches the location of the concealed target"); a vast national network of

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interconnected databases—the list goes on and on. In the first five months after the terrorist attacks the Pentagon liaison office that works with technology companies received more than 12,000 proposals for high-tech security measures. Credit-card companies expertly manage credit risks with advanced information-sorting algorithms, Larry Ellison, the head of Oracle, the world's biggest database firm, told *The New York Times* in April; "We should be managing security risks in exactly the same way." To "win the war on terrorism," a former deputy undersecretary of commerce, David J. Rothkopf, explained in the May/June issue of *Foreign Policy*, the nation will need "regiments of geeks"—"pocket-protector brigades" who "will provide the software, systems, and analytical resources" to "close the gaps Mohammed Atta and his associates revealed."

Such ideas have provoked the ire of civil-liberties groups, which fear that governments, corporations, and the police will misuse the new technology. Schneier's concerns are more basic. In his view, these measures can be useful, but their large-scale application will have little effect against terrorism. Worse, their use may make Americans less safe, because many of these tools fail badly—they're "brittle," in engineering jargon. Meanwhile, simple, effective, ductile measures are being overlooked or even rejected.

The government has been calling for a new security infrastructure: iris, retina, and fingerprint scanners; hand-geometry assayers; face-recognition software; smart cards with custom identification chips. Their use may on the whole make Americans less safe, because many of these tools fail badly—they're "brittle," in engineering jargon.

The distinction between ductile and brittle security dates back, Schneier has argued, to the nineteenth-century linguist and cryptographer Auguste Kerckhoffs, who set down what is now known as Kerckhoffs's principle. In good crypto systems, Kerckhoffs wrote, "the system should not depend on secrecy, and it should be able to fall into the enemy's hands without disadvantage." In other words, it should permit people to keep messages secret even if outsiders find out exactly how the encryption algorithm works.

At first blush this idea seems ludicrous. But contemporary cryptography follows Kerckhoffs's principle closely. The algorithms—the scrambling methods—are openly revealed; the only secret is the key. Indeed, Schneier says, Kerckhoffs's principle applies beyond codes and ciphers to security systems in general: every secret creates a potential failure point. Secrecy, in other words, is a prime cause of brittleness—and therefore something likely to make a system prone to catastrophic collapse. Conversely, openness provides ductility.

From this can be drawn several corollaries. One is that plans to add new layers of secrecy to security systems should automatically be viewed with suspicion. Another is that security systems that utterly depend on keeping secrets tend not to work very well. Alas, airport security is among these. Procedures for screening passengers, for examining luggage, for allowing people on the tarmac, for entering the cockpit, for running the autopilot software—all must be concealed, and all seriously compromise the system if they become known. As a result, Schneier wrote in the May issue of *Crypto-Gram*, brittleness "is an inherent property of airline security."

Few of the new airport-security proposals address this problem. Instead, Schneier told me in Los Angeles, they address problems that don't exist. "The idea that to stop bombings cars have to park three hundred feet away from the terminal, but meanwhile they can drop off passengers right up front like they always have ..." He laughed. "The only ideas I've heard that make any sense are reinforcing the cockpit door and getting the passengers to fight back." Both measures test well against Kerckhoffs's principle: knowing ahead of time that law-abiding passengers may forcefully resist a hijacking en masse, for example, doesn't help hijackers to fend off their assault. Both are small-scale, compartmentalized measures that make the system more ductile, because no matter how hijackers get aboard, beefed-up doors and resistant passengers will make it harder for them to fly into a nuclear plant. And neither measure has any adverse effect on civil liberties.

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Gummi Fingers

Tsutomu Matsumoto, a Japanese cryptographer, recently decided to look at biometric fingerprint devices. These are security systems that attempt to identify people based on their fingerprint. For years the companies selling these devices have claimed that they are very secure, and that it is almost impossible to fool them into accepting a fake finger as genuine. Matsumoto, along with his students at the Yokohama National University, showed that they can be reliably fooled with a little ingenuity and $10 worth of household supplies.

Matsumoto uses gelatin, the stuff that Gummi Bears are made out of. First he takes a live finger and makes a plastic mold. (He uses a free-molding plastic used to make plastic molds, and is sold at hobby shops.) Then he pours liquid gelatin into the mold and lets it harden. (The gelatin comes in solid sheets, and is used to make jellied meats, soups, and candies, and is sold in grocery stores.) This gelatin fake finger fools fingerprint detectors about 80% of the time ...

There's both a specific and a general moral to take away from this result. Matsumoto is not a professional fake-finger scientist; he's a mathematician. He didn't use expensive equipment or a specialized laboratory. He used $10 of ingredients you could buy, and whipped up his gummy fingers in the equivalent of a home kitchen. And he defeated eleven different commercial fingerprint readers, with both optical and capacitive sensors, and some with "live finger detection" features ... If he could do this, then any semi-professional can almost certainly do much more.

—*Bruce Schneier,* Crypto-Gram, *May 15, 2002*

Evaluations of a security proposal's merits, in Schneier's view, should not be much different from the ordinary cost-benefit calculations we make in daily life. The first question to ask of any new security proposal is, What problem does it solve? The second: What problems does it cause, especially when it fails?

Failure comes in many kinds, but two of the more important are simple failure (the security measure is ineffective) and what might be called subtractive failure (the security measure makes people less secure than before). An example of simple failure is face-recognition technology. In basic terms, face-recognition devices photograph people; break down their features into "facial building elements"; convert these into numbers that, like fingerprints, uniquely identify individuals; and compare the results with those stored in a database. If someone's facial score matches that of a criminal in the database, the person is detained. Since September 11 face-recognition technology has been placed in an increasing number of public spaces: airports, beaches, nightlife districts. Even visitors to the Statue of Liberty now have their faces scanned.

Face-recognition software could be useful. If an airline employee has to type in an identifying number to enter a secure area, for example, it can help to confirm that someone claiming to be that specific employee is indeed that person. But it cannot pick random terrorists out of the mob in an airline terminal. That much-larger-scale task requires comparing many sets of features with the many other sets of features in a database of people on a "watch list." Identix, of Minnesota, one of the largest face-recognition-technology companies, contends that in independent tests its FaceIt software has a success rate of 99.32 percent—that is, when the software matches a passenger's face with a face on a list of terrorists, it is mistaken only 0.68 percent of the time. Assume for the moment that this claim is credible; assume, too, that good pictures of suspected terrorists are readily available. About 25 million passengers used Boston's Logan Airport in 2001. Had face-recognition software been used on 25 million faces, it would have wrongly picked out just 0.68 percent of them—but that would have been enough, given the large number of passengers, to flag as many as 170,000 innocent people as terrorists. With almost 500 false alarms a day, the face-recognition system would quickly become something to ignore.

The potential for subtractive failure, different and more troublesome, is raised by recent calls to deploy biometric identification tools across the nation. Biometrics—"the only way to prevent identity fraud," according to the former senator Alan K. Simpson, of Wyoming—identifies people by precisely measuring their physical characteristics and matching them up against a database. The photographs on driver's licenses are an early example, but engineers have developed many high-tech alternatives, some of them already mentioned: fingerprint readers, voiceprint recorders, retina or iris scanners, face-recognition devices, hand-geometry assayers, even signature-geometry analyzers, which register pen pressure and writing speed as well as the appearance of a signature.

Appealingly, biometrics lets people be their own ID cards—no more passwords to forget! Unhappily, biometric measures are often implemented poorly. This past spring three reporters at *c't*, a German digital-culture magazine, tested a face-recognition system, an iris scanner, and nine fingerprint readers. All proved easy to outsmart. Even at the highest security setting, Cognitec's FaceVACS-Logon could be fooled by showing the sensor a short digital movie of someone known to the system—the president of a company, say—on a laptop screen. To beat Panasonic's Authenticam iris scanner, the German journalists photographed an authorized user, took the photo and created a detailed, life-size image of his eyes, cut out the pupils, and held the

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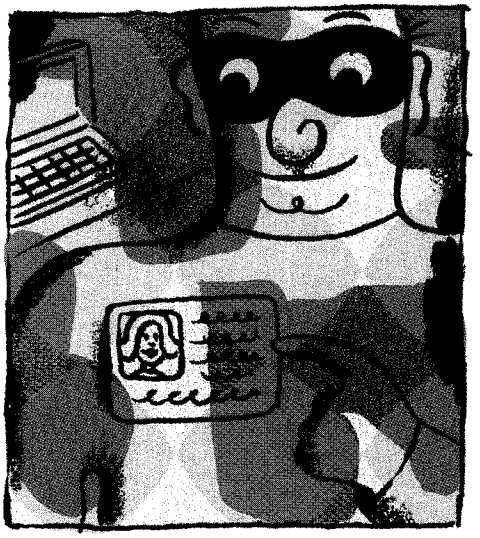
image up before their faces like a mask. The scanner read the iris, detected the presence of a human pupil—and accepted the imposture. Many of the fingerprint readers could be tricked simply by breathing on them, reactivating the last user's fingerprint. Beating the more sophisticated Identix Bio-Touch fingerprint reader required a trip to a hobby shop. The journalists used graphite powder to dust the latent fingerprint—the kind left on glass—of a previous, authorized user; picked up the image on adhesive tape; and pressed the tape on the reader. The Identix reader, too, was fooled. Not all biometric devices are so poorly put together, of course. But all of them fail badly.

Consider the legislation introduced in May by Congressmen Jim Moran and Tom Davis, both of Virginia, that would mandate biometric data chips in driver's licenses—a sweeping, nationwide data-collection program, in essence. (Senator Dick Durbin, of Illinois, is proposing measures to force states to use a "single identifying designation unique to the individual on all driver's licenses"; President George W. Bush has already signed into law a requirement for biometric student visas.) Although Moran and Davis tied their proposal to the need for tighter security after last year's attacks, they also contended that the nation could combat fraud by using smart licenses with bank, credit, and Social Security cards, and for voter registration and airport identification. Maybe so, Schneier says. "But think about screw-ups, because the system *will* screw up."



Smart cards that store non-biometric data have been routinely cracked in the past, often with inexpensive oscilloscope-like devices that detect and interpret the timing and power fluctuations as the chip operates. An even cheaper method, announced in May by two Cambridge security researchers, requires only a bright light, a standard microscope, and duct tape. Biometric ID cards are equally vulnerable. Indeed, as a recent National Research Council study points out, the extra security supposedly provided by biometric ID cards will raise the economic incentive to counterfeit or steal them, with potentially disastrous consequences to the victims. "Okay, somebody steals your thumbprint," Schneier says. "Because we've centralized all the functions, the thief can tap your credit, open your medical records, start your car, any number of things. Now what do you do? With a credit card, the bank can issue you a new card with a new number. But this is your *thumb*—you can't get a new one."

The consequences of identity fraud might be offset if biometric licenses and visas helped to prevent terrorism. Yet smart cards would not have stopped the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. According to the FBI, all the hijackers seem to have been who they said they were; their intentions, not their identities, were the issue. Each entered the country with a valid visa, and each had a photo ID in his real name (some obtained their IDs fraudulently, but the fakes correctly identified them). "What problem is being solved here?" Schneier asks.

Good security is built in overlapping, cross-checking layers, to slow down attacks; it reacts limberly to the unexpected. Its most important components are almost always human. "Governments have been relying on intelligent, trained guards for centuries," Schneier says. "They spot people doing bad things and then use laws to arrest them. All in all, I have to say, it's not a bad system."

The Human Touch

One of the first times I met with Schneier was at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., that had asked him to speak about security. Afterward I wondered how the Cato people had reacted to the speech. Libertarians love cryptography, because they believe that it will let people keep their secrets forever, no matter what a government wants. To them, Schneier was a kind of hero, someone who fought the good fight. As a cryptog-

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rapher, he had tremendous street cred: he had developed some of the world's coolest ciphers, including the first rigorous encryption algorithm ever published in a best-selling novel (*Cryptonomicon*, by Neal Stephenson) and the encryption for the "virtual box tops" on Kellogg's cereals (children type a code from the box top into a Web site to win prizes), and had been one of the finalists in the competition to write algorithms for the federal government's new encryption standard, which it adopted last year. Now, in the nicest possible way, he had just told the libertarians the bad news: he still loved cryptography for the intellectual challenge, but it was not all that relevant to protecting the privacy and security of real people.

In security terms, he explained, cryptography is classed as a protective countermeasure. No such measure can foil every attack, and all attacks must still be both detected and responded to. This is particularly true for digital security, and Schneier spent most of his speech evoking the staggering insecurity of networked computers. Countless numbers are broken into every year, including machines in people's homes. Taking over computers is simple with the right tools, because software is so often misconfigured or flawed. In the first five months of this year, for example, Microsoft released five "critical" security patches for Internet Explorer, each intended to rectify lapses in the original code.

Computer crime statistics are notoriously sketchy, but the best of a bad lot come from an annual survey of corporations and other institutions by the FBI and the Computer Security Institute, a research and training organization in San Francisco. In the most recent survey, released in April, 90 percent of the respondents had detected one or more computer-security breaches within the previous twelve months—a figure that Schneier calls "almost certainly an underestimate." His own experience suggests that a typical corporate network suffers a serious security breach four to six times a year—more often if the network is especially large or its operator is politically controversial.

Luckily for the victims, this digital mayhem is mostly wreaked not by the master hackers depicted in Hollywood techno-thrillers but by "script kiddies"—youths who know just enough about computers to download and run automated break-in programs. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, script kiddies poke and prod at computer networks, searching for any of the thousands of known security vulnerabilities that administrators have not yet patched. A typical corporate network, Schneier says, is hit by such doorknob-rattling several times an hour. The great majority of these attacks achieve nothing, but eventually any existing security holes will be found and exploited. "It's very hard to communicate how bad the situation is," Schneier says, "because it doesn't correspond to our normal intuition of the world. To a first approximation, bank vaults are secure. Most of them don't get broken into, because it takes real skill. Computers are the opposite. Most of them get broken into all the time, and it takes practically no skill." Indeed, as automated cracking software improves, it takes ever less knowledge to mount ever more sophisticated attacks.

Given the pervasive insecurity of networked computers, it is striking that nearly every proposal for "homeland security" entails the creation of large national databases. The Moran-Davis proposal, like other biometric schemes, envisions storing smart-card information in one such database; the USA PATRIOT Act effectively creates another; the proposed Department of Homeland Security would "fuse and analyze" information from more than a hundred agencies, and would "merge under one roof" scores or hundreds of previously separate databases. (A representative of the new department told me no one had a real idea of the number. "It's a lot," he said.) Better coordination of data could have obvious utility, as was made clear by recent headlines about the failure of the FBI and the CIA to communicate. But carefully linking selected fields of data is different

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from creating huge national repositories of information about the citizenry, as is being proposed. Larry Ellison, the CEO of Oracle, has dismissed cautions about such databases as whiny cavils that don't take into account the existence of murderous adversaries. But murderous adversaries are exactly why we should ensure that new security measures actually make American life safer.

How Insurance Improves Security

Eventually, the insurance industry will subsume the computer security industry. Not that insurance companies will start marketing security products, but rather that the kind of firewall you use—along with the kind of authentication scheme you use, the kind of operating system you use, and the kind of network monitoring scheme you use—will be strongly influenced by the constraints of insurance.

Consider security, and safety, in the real world. Businesses don't install building alarms because it makes them feel safer; they do it because they get a reduction in their insurance rates. Building-owners don't install sprinkler systems out of affection for their tenants, but because building codes and insurance policies demand it. Deciding what kind of theft and fire prevention equipment to install are risk management decisions, and the risk taker of last resort is the insurance industry ...

Businesses achieve security through insurance. They take the risks they are not willing to accept themselves, bundle them up, and pay someone else to make them go away. If a warehouse is insured properly, the owner really doesn't care if it burns down or not. If he does care, he's underinsured ...

What will happen when the CFO looks at his premium and realizes that it will go down 50% if he gets rid of all his insecure Windows operating systems and replaces them with a secure version of Linux? The choice of which operating system to use will no longer be 100% technical. Microsoft, and other companies with shoddy security, will start losing sales because companies don't want to pay the insurance premiums. In this vision of the future, how secure a product is becomes a real, measurable, feature that companies are willing to pay for ... because it saves them money in the long run.

—*Bruce Schneier,* Crypto-Gram, *March 15, 2001*

Any new database must be protected, which automatically entails a new layer of secrecy. As Kerckhoffs's principle suggests, the new secrecy introduces a new failure point. Government information is now scattered through scores of databases; however inadvertently, it has been compartmentalized—a basic security practice. (Following this practice, tourists divide their money between their wallets and hidden pouches; pickpockets are less likely to steal it all.) Many new proposals would change that. An example is Attorney General John Ashcroft's plan, announced in June, to fingerprint and photograph foreign visitors "who fall into categories of elevated national security concern" when they enter the United States ("approximately 100,000" will be tracked this way in the first year). The fingerprints and photographs will be compared with those of "known or suspected terrorists" and "wanted criminals." Alas, no such database of terrorist fingerprints and photographs exists. Most terrorists are outside the country, and thus hard to fingerprint, and latent fingerprints rarely survive bomb blasts. The databases of "wanted criminals" in Ashcroft's plan seem to be those maintained by the FBI and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. But using them for this purpose would presumably involve merging computer networks in these two agencies with the visa procedure in the State Department—a security nightmare, because no one entity will fully control access to the system.

Equivalents of the big, centralized databases under discussion already exist in the private sector: corporate warehouses of customer information, especially credit-card numbers. The record there is not reassuring. "Millions upon millions of credit-card numbers have been stolen from computer networks," Schneier says. So many, in fact, that Schneier believes that everyone reading this article "has, in his or her wallet right now, a credit card with a number that has been stolen," even if no criminal has yet used it. Number thieves, many of whom operate out of the former Soviet Union, sell them in bulk: $1,000 for 5,000 credit-card numbers, or twenty cents apiece. In a way, the sheer volume of theft is fortunate: so many numbers are floating around that the odds are small that any one will be heavily used by bad guys.

Large-scale federal databases would undergo similar assaults. The prospect is worrying, given the government's long-standing reputation for poor information security. Since September 11 at least forty government networks have been publicly cracked by typographically challenged vandals with names like "CriminalS," "S4t4n1c SOuls," "cr1m3 0rg4n1z4d0," and "Discordian Dodgers." Summing up the problem, a House subcommittee last November awarded federal agencies a collective computer-security grade of F. According to representatives of Oracle, the federal government has been talking with the company about employing its software for the new central databases. But judging from the past, involving the private sector will not greatly improve security. In March, CERT/CC, a computer-security watchdog based at Carnegie Mellon University, warned of thirty-eight

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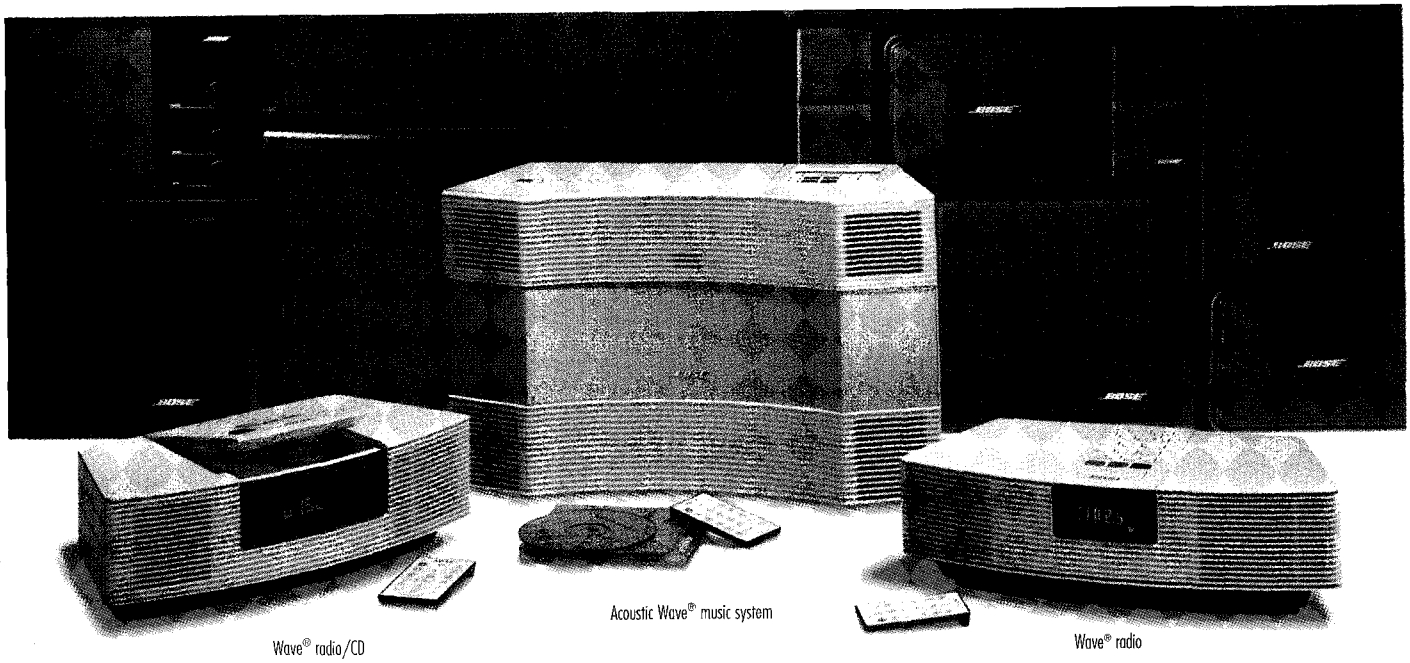

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Remember Pearl Harbor

Surprise, when it happens to a government, is likely to be a complicated, diffuse, bureaucratic thing ... It includes gaps in intelligence, but also intelligence that, like a string of pearls too precious to wear, is too sensitive to give to those who need it. It includes the alarm that fails to work, but also the alarm that has gone off so often it has been disconnected. It includes the unalert watchman, but also the one who knows he'll be chewed out by his superior if he gets higher authority out of bed. It includes the contingencies that occur to no one, but also those that everyone assumes somebody else is taking care of. It includes straightforward procrastination, but also decisions protracted by internal disagreement. It includes, in addition, the inability of individual human beings to rise to the occasion until they are sure it *is* the occasion—which is usually too late. (Unlike movies, real life provides no musical background to tip us off to the climax.) Finally, as at Pearl Harbor, surprise may include some measure of genuine novelty introduced by the enemy, and possibly some sheer bad luck.

The results, at Pearl Harbor, were sudden, concentrated, and dramatic. The failure, however, was cumulative, widespread, and rather drearily familiar. This is why surprise, when it happens to a government, cannot be described just in terms of startled people. Whether at Pearl Harbor or at the Berlin Wall, surprise is everything involved in a government's (or in an alliance's) failure to anticipate effectively.

—*Foreword by Thomas C. Schelling to* Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision *(1962) by Roberta Wohlstetter*

vulnerabilities in Oracle's database software. Meanwhile, a centerpiece of the company's international advertising is the claim that its software is "unbreakable." Other software vendors fare no better: CERT/CC issues a constant stream of vulnerability warnings about every major software firm.

Schneier, like most security experts I spoke to, does not oppose consolidating and modernizing federal databases per se. To avoid creating vast new opportunities for adversaries, the overhaul should be incremental and small-scale. Even so, it would need to be planned with extreme care—something that shows little sign of happening.

One key to the success of digital revamping will be a little-mentioned, even prosaic feature: training the users not to circumvent secure systems. The federal government already has several computer networks—INTELINK, SIPRNET, and NIPRNET among them—that are fully encrypted, accessible only from secure rooms and buildings, and never connected to the Internet. Yet despite their lack of Net access the secure networks have been infected by e-mail perils such as the Melissa and I Love You viruses, probably because some official checked e-mail on a laptop, got infected, and then plugged the same laptop into the classified network. Because secure networks are unavoidably harder to work with, people are frequently tempted to bypass them—one reason that researchers at weapons labs sometimes transfer their files to insecure but more convenient machines.

Schneier has long argued that the best way to improve the very bad situation in computer security is to change software licenses. If software is blatantly unsafe, owners have no such recourse, because it is licensed rather than bought, and the licenses forbid litigation. It is unclear whether the licenses can legally do this (courts currently disagree), but as a practical matter it is next to impossible to win a lawsuit against a software firm. If some big software companies lose product-liability suits, Schneier believes, their confreres will begin to take security seriously.

Computer networks are difficult to keep secure in part because they have so many functions, each of which must be accounted for. For that reason Schneier and other experts tend to favor narrowly focused security measures—more of them physical than digital—that target a few precisely identified problems. For air travel, along with reinforcing cockpit doors and teaching passengers to fight back, examples include armed uniformed—*not* plainclothes—guards on select flights; "dead-man" switches that in the event of a pilot's incapacitation force planes to land by autopilot at the nearest airport; positive bag matching (ensuring that luggage does not get on a plane unless its owner also boards); and separate decompression facilities that detonate any altitude bombs in cargo before takeoff. None of these is completely effective; bag matching, for instance, would not stop suicide bombers. But all are well tested, known to at least impede hijackers, not intrusive to passengers, and unlikely to make planes less secure if they fail.

It is impossible to guard all potential targets, because anything and everything can be subject to attack. Palestinian suicide bombers have shown this by murdering at random the occupants of pool halls and hotel meeting rooms. Horrible as these incidents are, they do not risk the lives of thousands of people, as would attacks on critical parts of the national infrastructure: nuclear-power plants, hydroelectric dams, reservoirs, gas and chemical facilities. Here a classic defense is available: tall fences and armed guards. Yet this past spring the Bush Administration cut by 93 percent the funds requested by the Energy Department to bolster security for nuclear weapons and waste; it denied completely the funds requested by the Army Corps of Engineers for guarding 200 reservoirs,

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dams, and canals, leaving fourteen large public-works projects with no budget for protection. A recommendation by the American Association of Port Authorities that the nation spend a total of $700 million to inspect and control ship cargo (today less than two percent of container traffic is inspected) has so far resulted in grants of just $92 million. In all three proposals most of the money would have been spent on guards and fences.

The most important element of any security measure, Schneier argues, is people, not technology—and the people need to be at the scene. Recall the German journalists who fooled the fingerprint readers and iris scanners. None of their tricks would have worked if a reasonably attentive guard had been watching. Conversely, legitimate employees with bandaged fingers or scratched corneas will never make it through security unless a guard at the scene is authorized to overrule the machinery. Giving guards increased authority provides more opportunities for abuse, Schneier says, so the guards must be supervised carefully. But a system with more people who have more responsibility "is more robust," he observed in the June *Crypto-Gram*, "and the best way to make things work. (The U.S. Marine Corps understands this principle; it's the heart of their chain of command rules.)"

"The trick is to remember that technology can't save you," Schneier says. "We know this in our own lives. We realize that there's no magic anti-burglary dust we can sprinkle on our cars to prevent them from being stolen. We know that car alarms don't offer much protection. The Club at best makes burglars steal the car next to you. For real safety we park on nice streets where people notice if somebody smashes the window. Or we park in garages, where somebody watches the car. In both cases people are the essential security element. You always build the system around people."

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Looking for Trouble

After meeting Schneier at the Cato Institute, I drove with him to the Washington command post of Counterpane Internet Security. It was the first time in many months that he had visited either of his company's two operating centers (the other is in Silicon Valley). His absence had been due not to inattentiveness but to his determination to avoid the classic high-tech mistake of involving the alpha geek in day-to-day management. Besides, he lives in Minneapolis, and the company headquarters are in Cupertino, California. (Why Minneapolis? I asked. "My wife lives there," he said. "It seemed polite.") With his partner, Tom Rowley, supervising day-to-day operations, Schneier constantly travels in Counterpane's behalf, explaining how the company manages computer security for hundreds of large and medium-sized companies. It does this mainly by installing human beings.

The command post was nondescript even by the bland architectural standards of exurban office complexes. Gaining access was like a pop quiz in security: How would the operations center recognize and admit its boss, who was there only once or twice a year? In this country requests for identification are commonly answered with a driver's license. A few years ago Schneier devoted considerable effort to persuading the State of Illinois to issue him a driver's license that showed no picture, signature, or Social Security number. But Schneier's license serves as identification just as well as a license showing a picture and a signature—which is to say, not all that well. With or without a picture, with or without a biometric chip, licenses cannot be more than state-issued cards with people's names on them: good enough for social purposes, but never enough to assure identification when it is important. Authentication, Schneier says, involves something a person knows (a password or a PIN, say), has (a physical token, such as a driver's license or an ID bracelet), or is (biometric data). Security systems should

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use at least two of these; the Counterpane center employs all three. At the front door Schneier typed in a PIN and waved an iButton on his key chain at a sensor (iButtons, made by Dallas Semiconductor, are programmable chips embedded in stainless-steel discs about the size and shape of a camera battery). We entered a waiting room, where Schneier completed the identification trinity by placing his palm on a hand-geometry reader.

Beyond the waiting room, after a purposely long corridor studded with cameras, was a conference room with many electrical outlets, some of which Schneier commandeered for his cell phone, laptop, BlackBerry, and battery packs. One side of the room was a dark glass wall. Schneier flicked a switch, shifting the light and theatrically revealing the scene behind the glass. It was a Luddite nightmare: an auditorium-like space full of desks, each with two computer monitors; all the desks faced a wall of high-resolution screens. One displayed streams of data from the "sentry" machines that Counterpane installs in its clients' networks. Another displayed images from the video cameras scattered around both this command post and the one in Silicon Valley.

On a visual level the gadgetry overwhelmed the people sitting at the desks and watching over the data. Nonetheless, the people were the most important part of the operation. Networks record so much data about their usage that overwhelmed managers frequently turn off most of the logging programs and ignore the others. Among Counterpane's primary functions is to help companies make sense of the data they already have. "We turn the logs back on and monitor them," Schneier says. Counterpane researchers developed software to measure activity on client networks, but no software by itself can determine whether an unusual signal is a meaningless blip or an indication of trouble. That was the job of the people at the desks.

Highly trained and well paid, these people brought to the task a quality not yet found in any technology: human judgment, which is at the heart of most good security. Human beings do make mistakes, of course. But they can recover from failure in ways that machines and software cannot. The well-trained mind is ductile. It can understand surprises and overcome them. It fails well.

When I asked Schneier why Counterpane had such Darth Vaderish command centers, he laughed and said it helped to reassure potential clients that the company had mastered the technology. I asked if clients ever inquired how Counterpane trains the guards and analysts in the command centers. "Not often," he said, although that training is in fact the center of the whole system. Mixing long stretches of inactivity with short bursts of frenzy, the work rhythm of the Counterpane guards would have been familiar to police officers and firefighters everywhere. As I watched the guards, they were slurping soft drinks, listening to techno-death metal, and waiting for something to go wrong. They were in a protected space, looking out at a dangerous world. Sentries around Neolithic campfires did the same thing. Nothing better has been discovered since. Thinking otherwise, in Schneier's view, is a really terrible idea.

Charles C. Mann, an Atlantic *correspondent, has written for the magazine since 1984. He is at work on a book based on his March 2002* Atlantic *cover story, "1491."*

Further Reading

For clear primers on modern cryptography and on network security, it is hard to do better than Bruce Schneier's *Applied Cryptography* (1993) and *Secrets and Lies* (2000), respectively; these books (especially the latter) render technological arcana comprehensible to even the willfully Luddite.

The consensus classic in the field of cryptology remains ***The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing*** (1967), by David Kahn. Kahn spent four years working on a book that sought, in his words, "to cover the entire history of cryptology." (That is in fact a modest description of a 1,200-page book that begins with a chapter called "The First 3,000 Years" and closes, twenty-five chapters later, with "Messages From Outer Space.") All subsequent chroniclers of cryptography unavoidably stand on Kahn's shoulders. But *The Codebreakers* nearly died aborning: reportedly, the Pentagon tried to suppress its publication; only after Kahn agreed to delete three passages was the book finally published. Kahn issued a new edition of the book in 1996, bringing his history nearly up to the century's end. Two of the most relevant books on the subject of homeland security, both published in 1998, were also the most prescient. ***Terrorism and America: A Commonsense Strategy for a Democratic Society***, by Philip B. Heymann, and ***America's Achilles' Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack***, by Richard A. Falkenrath, Robert D. Newman, and Bradley A. Thayer, warned of the imminent danger of a major terrorist attack on American soil.

Although the proposed Department of Homeland Security was hastily thrown together, the idea for such an entity had circulated within the government for years. Some of the proposals can be found in the excellent compilation of disparate reports that the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations put together last fall, when it was preparing for hearings on the subject of national security. The compilation is called ***Strategies for Homeland Defense*** and is available on the Internet at purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS15541.

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ELEGIES

.....

MERCY

A murder of crows,
what I saw on a spindle of dead white oak,
two or three of them, at different times,
hectoring the head of the sick one,
the old one, the weak one apart.
From school those Eskimo stories
in which leathery grandfathers and grandmothers
are left behind or set afloat.
They'd freeze, Mr. Steinman said, from the extremities in.
Thinking about what they must have been thinking,
I imagined the brain last
on the ascending list—
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow
I read, in chilling poetry,
years later. Even at twelve,
the concept seemed distant, efficient,
in keeping with the clarity
and killing cold of vast, undifferentiated arctic spaces.
In keeping with the landscape of the old.
In the language of the desert Navajo,
the old man didn't drown,
the water came up to get him.
That's how I imagined freezing,
as a kind of incremental drowning,
a sort of slow, word-by-word submersion,
then, at last, the pulling under, rings on water.
The killed crow fell the sixty feet in seconds,
less, though in the while it took
to find it, it had moved. My mother,
alive in the machine,
becalmed on hard white sheets,
the narrative of legs, arms,
animal centers stilled,
some starlight in the mind glittering off
and on, couldn't tell me
whether or not to leave her.

—STANLEY PLUMLY

THE REUNIFICATION CENTER

We brought pictures of the missing,
held gingerly, by the cropped margins,
as if the eyes were scalding; or food:
steaming casseroles without ladles,
though the night was mild; Evian;
M&M's, which we tried to hand out
in that cordoned-off street
where an ambulance chugged empty.

And each stranger refused, a little pained,
no, no, I'm here to help; we offered aspirin,
stock certificates, a child's rocking horse,
a teddy bear with an empty eye socket,
but no one consented to receive that treasure.

A doctor ashen with fatigue shouted
into a cell phone, shaking it
when it didn't answer; a digger
dozed hugging his shovel;
a survivor, mesmerized by the portraits,
stunned at their beauty, compared them
scar by scar with the faces of the living.

—D. NURKSE

LAUDS FOR ST. GERMAINE COUSIN (1579–1601)

Blessed is the One who lifts the slow sun
    above this morning's raw orange edge,
who moves the ewe to nudge her birth-
    stunned lamb into the flock's heat, who
leads the hen to steer her keets as soon as
    they can walk into the insect-
filled, high grass, guides the owl to tear fresh
    pigeon into pieces small enough
to fill the owlet's gaping bill,
    and prompts the rat to lick the pup
that's not her own and take it to her side,
    directs the swan to trumpet,
bob her head, and raise her wings, quivering

    into a living canopy
above the nest built without hands
    by those who have no hands, just wings,
wings that cannot weave but must and somehow
    do, just as I twist thread from the distaff's
wild wether wool, skirted, sorted, scoured,
    and drawn into bumps of roving
held awry until the sun lifts
    high enough to warm these slow fingers
spinning fast and faster, dropping
    the spindle like a top, whorling
fibers clockwise to pull the yarn
    taut and straight, plying many into one.

—CHRISTIANNE BALK

Stanley Plumly's most recent book is Now That My Father Lies Down Beside Me *(2000). A Distinguished Professor at the University of Maryland, Plumly recently won an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. D. Nurkse is the author of seven books of verse, including* The Rules of Paradise *(2001) and* The Fall *(2002). Christianne Balk, who lives in Seattle, is the author of* Bindweed *(1986) and* Desiring Flight *(1995).*

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LETTER FROM EGYPT

"There is a question," our correspondent writes, "that less-sophisticated Americans ask (and more-sophisticated Americans would like to): Why are people in the Middle East so crazy? Here, at the pyramids, was an answer from the earliest days of civilization: People have always been crazy."

BY P. J. O'ROURKE

Illustrations by Eric Hanson

.....

Hatred between Palestinians and Israelis abides. Arab-led Islamic fundamentalism destabilizes nations from Algeria to the Philippines. The threat of terrorist attacks by al Qaeda continues. Also, our car needs gas. It is important to understand Arab culture.

Egypt seems a good place to start. Egypt is by far the most populous Arab state. And although Egypt is a poor country in per-capita-income terms, its economy is larger than Saudi Arabia's. Historically Egypt has been the most westward-looking of Arab countries. A Napoleonic invasion, an Albanian pasha named Muhammad Ali, and a British takeover gave Egyptians plenty to look at. The modern Islamist movement can be dated from the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood, by an Egyptian schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna, in 1928. Two of Osama bin Laden's closest aides, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the late Muhammad Atef, came from Egypt, as did Mohammed Atta, who led the September 11 hijackings. And there is this thing called the "Arab street," which various serious people take seriously. In the November 11, 2001, *New York Times*, John Kifner wrote, "It is on just this Arab ... street that President Bush must fight in his war against Osama bin Laden." On January 24, 2002, Chris Matthews said on the television program *Hardball*, "America's been fighting another kind of war to win the hearts and minds of the Arab street." And on November 16, 2001, the *NBC Nightly News* reporter Martin Fletcher, broadcasting from Cairo, declared, "The battleground isn't only in Afghanistan; it's here in the Arab street." Well, Cairo has thousands of miles of street.

But there's a problem with Egypt. It's been around for five millennia. America is only three human life-spans in age. I'm an American born and bred, so were my folks, and ... How could the same small part of America vote for Rudolph Giuliani *and* Hillary Clinton? How could any part of America elect a professional wrestler as governor? Why isn't he noticeably worse than other governors? Why is the fastest-growing spectator sport in America watching cars turn left? How come I've never heard of anyone—Linkin Park, Big Tymers, Musiq—on the *Billboard* Top 50? Why can't they spell? By what means did the Amazon.com list of best sellers come to contain *The Wisdom of Menopause*, *Self Matters*, *Look Great Naked*, and *BodyChange*—the last by someone called Montel Williams, who is on daytime TV? Have you ever *watched* daytime TV? Who are these people taking DNA tests to see which one molested the Rottweiler?

I don't understand anything about America's culture. What could I hope to learn about Egypt's? Actually, quite a bit—before I'd been officially in the country for more than a minute. Coming through passport control, I was detained by a solemn fellow who showed me a badge. In his well-ironed dress-down Friday clothing, clean grooming, and chilly politeness, he was the exact counterpart of a Mossad agent at Ben-Gurion Airport. "I would like to ask you a few questions about why you are visiting Egypt," the solemn fellow said.

My tour operator, carrying a placard with my name completely misspelled, swooped in with a great bustle: "We are a prominent Egyptian tourism company! Government-licensed! This man is a valued client! Tourism is in a ruinous state! Do you even *see* another tourist?! What will become of Egypt's foreign-reserve situation?!"—although that was all body language. I believe the only thing my tour operator actually said to the intelligence officer was "He's with me." Away we went. Have your travel agent try that with the Mossad.

There was another lesson in just the drive through Cairo from the airport, on the far east side of town, to my hotel, by the pyramids in the west. It's the lesson of all swollen capitals in societies with uncompetitive economies. "In a competitive society," the economist Friedrich Hayek once said, "most things can be had at a price—though it is often a cruelly high price we have to pay ... The alternative

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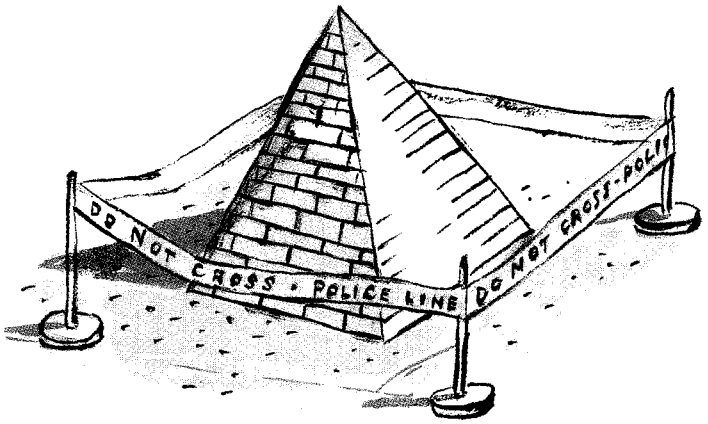
is ... the favor of the mighty." The mighty have their seat in the capital. Better stick close to their chair legs and napkins to get a crumb from the mighty's table.

Cairo is the largest city in the Middle East and Africa, with as many as 16 million people, most of whom were offering to carry my luggage at the airport. And they were more persistent than the secret police. Annex Damascus to Beirut, Baghdad, Kuwait City, Jerusalem, and Riyadh (what a war you'd have!) and you still wouldn't get Cairo. Almost a quarter of the people in Egypt live in the city, a long haul from the sea, on the site of an old fort of middling strategic importance, distant from natural resources or any traditional means of creating wealth except the Nile farmlands now under Cairo pavement. Think of a capital of the United States located in an obscure Maryland swamp with 70 million Americans gathered there to be close to Medicare benefits, Fannie Mae, and Small Business Administration loan originations.

After ninety minutes in my tour van I realized: so vast is



Cairo, there really is no way across it. At least no way with my eyes open. The traffic is too scary. We Americans, who invented traffic, are always being startled by the forms into which it has evolved around the world. (God, if he's a Darwinian, may be similarly aghast at life.) But most foreign driving has the advantage of either brevity, in its breakneck pace, or safe if sorry periods of complete rest, in jam-ups. Cairenes achieve the prolonged bravado of NASCAR drivers while also turning any direction they want, in congestion worse than L.A.'s during an O.J. freeway chase.

When I could bear to peek, I saw traffic cops—not in ones or twos but in committees, set up at intersections and acting with the efficiency and decisiveness usual to committees. And I saw a driving school. What could the instruction be like? "No, no, Anwar, *faster* through the stop sign, and make your left from the *far-right* lane." Surely John Kifner, Chris Matthews, and NBC News are kidding when they use "Arab street" as a metaphor for anything in the Middle East. Or, considering the history of the Middle East, maybe they aren't.

The bar at the Mena House Hotel, in Giza, has half a dozen floor-to-ceiling windows, and the view of the Great Pyramid of Khufu fills them all. A number of people were in the bar. Unfortunately for business, they all worked there. Several waiters craned their necks, trying to catch my eye. Across the room full of empty tables a musical trio abandoned their classical repertoire and began cracking one another up with jazz noodlings of "Woman in Love." Out in the lobby, by the front door, was an unattended metal detector. Every now and then it emitted a merry buzz, and everyone in the bar looked up hopefully, only to find another idle taxi driver on his way to the men's room.

I wandered across the street to the pyramid complex, now closed for the evening. Behind a police station was a stable yard with horses and camels kept for foreign visitors who, in better times, when there *are* foreign visitors, want a Lawrence of Suburbia moment on their home videos. There I met Mousa, who presented himself, in so many words, as the Night Mayor of Khufu. He promised a forbidden after-hours tour.

"Can we climb to the top?" I asked.

"It is forbidden."

We walked through an alley, past a large hole in the wall that surrounds the pyramid complex. "Japanese tourists did this," Mousa said, "to climb to the top." Has anyone had any success understanding Japanese culture?

Mousa told me that he worked as an unlicensed guide from eight at night until two-thirty in the morning. He supported, he said, his father, his wife, three daughters, his sister whose husband had died, and his sister's child. "I must tell my father there is one tourist in Egypt," Mousa said.

I asked him about the September 11 terrorist attacks. "Whoever does this ruins my life," Mousa said. "I do not know who does this."

Perhaps taking my silence as a rebuke, Mousa continued, "Maybe Osama bin Laden does this." He warmed to his theme. "Osama bin Laden does the killing in Luxor." Mousa was referring to the murder of fifty-eight tourists at the Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, in November of 1997. And Mousa may have had a point. According to the Egyptian police, one of the killers, Midhat Mohammed Abdel-Rahman, had traveled to Afghanistan and Sudan for terrorist training. "Osama lives in Egypt before," Mousa said. (Maybe not, but the family business, Binladen Brothers for Contracting and Industry, employs 40,000 Egyptians.) "And has no respect for Egypt. He tries to destroy our country."

We walked across the outskirts of the village of Nazlet as-Samaan. The people who helped with the building of the pyramids once lived here. Now the people who help with the gawking do. We went behind the Sphinx into the quarry where pyramid makings were cut, 4,600 years ago, and climbed to the edge of the Giza Plateau. There was Khufu—immense, 449 feet high, almost exactly 745 feet wide at the base of each side.

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The stones aren't as big as those that the Hebrews in *The Ten Commandments* hauled across the movie screen. The real blocks of granite and limestone are about the size of industrial air-conditioning units on strip-mall roofs. They look depressingly unfake. You can imagine the awful labor of heaving and pulling these rocks—2.3 million of them, according to Mousa.

There is a question that less-sophisticated Americans ask (and more-sophisticated Americans would like to): Why are people in the Middle East so crazy? Here, at the pyramids, was an answer from the earliest days of civilization: People have always been crazy.

A certain amount of craziness, if not possessed already, can be acquired trying to walk in Cairo. The city is well supplied with sidewalks, but they just take you around the block. You can't step off them, because of the traffic. The locals manage to cross streets. I began thinking that Cairenes employ some chapter of the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, which I missed when I was a hippie, that tells them how to keep going after they've been squashed between two trucks.

It took me forty-five minutes to cross the Shari El Corniche to get to the Nile embankment—and then, rather than try it again, I hiked almost a mile to what I thought was a walkway overpass. It wasn't an overpass. It was a stairway for pedestrian access to one of Cairo's few stretches of expressway. I guess this was installed for those bored with ordinary Cairo jaywalking: a sort of double-black-diamond run for the Cairo shoe slalom. Later, in a taxi on this same expressway, my driver missed an exit and backed up to it from somewhere beyond the next one.

Cairo's buildings are Cairo's traffic in concrete. Every structure seems halfway through construction or halfway through demolition, and some seem to be undergoing both. This is modern Cairo. You can find old stones in the town if you let your tour guide drag you to them. My tour guide, Peter, did his best to show me a first-century Roman fort, the ninth-century mosque of Ibn Tulun, and Saladin's twelfth-century citadel. But even the pyramids are as beside the point in Cairo as the Dutch wall is on Wall Street. Functionally all of Cairo is modern. The population was only 570,100 in 1897. The number of residents has more than tripled in the past twenty-five years. I saw a cement truck, barrel turning, load ready to pour, driving down a Cairo street at two o'clock in the morning.

Upthrustings and downtearings in central Cairo's business district look the way they do in every busy place. Or they would if you could see them behind the profusion of blimp-sized billboards that look the way they do in every busy place. As it turns out, the Nile *is* just a river in Egypt—not nearly as wide as the Hudson River at the George Washington Bridge. Cairo's rich have river views and live, as most rich do nowadays, in apartment houses of faceless effrontery. The only apparent difference from the apartments of the American rich with river views is that in the Cairo apartments every single room has a huge chandelier.

But the emblematic building of Cairo is the small tower block—five or six stories designed in a functionalism so basic that the Bauhaus architects were lapdogs of ornamentalism by comparison. Slab floors are supported by reinforced-concrete posts and beams, like the skeletons of timber-frame Colonial farmhouses—and like Colonial farmhouses, the tower blocks tend sometimes to the rhomboid. The spaces between the posts are filled with jumbles of approximately brick-shaped bricks and punctuated, apparently at random, with little windows and balconies. The outside edges of poured-concrete staircases poke through the masonry, their runs and risers making zigzag patterns. Dried oozes of mortar cling to the brickwork. Water pipes and electrical wires are tacked onto the outside walls as if in half-hearted, rust-staining homage to the Pompidou Center.

In Europe these myriad domiciles would look like self-storage units for the urban proletariat. In Egypt concrete mosques are crammed between the tenements and festooned with colored lights—as if for Christmas decoration, except no red, just the green of Islam. Commerce hums on the ground floors in shops and restaurants, one called Pizza Hat. Roofs are adorned with the festive dishware of satellite TV. The walls of the little balconies are plastered and painted blindingly cheerful shades of swimming-pool blue and lawn-chemical green.

"Plain exteriors," Peter said, "mean less taxes to the government. Interiors are very often elaborate." And peering into bright living rooms, I could see another emblematic Cairo item—the astonishingly ugly sofa. An ideal Egyptian davenport has two Fontainebleaus' (the one in France and the one in Miami) worth of carving and gilt and is upholstered in plush, petit point, plaid, and paisley, as if Donald Trump and Madame de Pompadour and Queen Victoria and The Doors had gotten together to start a decorating firm. Often there's a pair of matching chairs.

You see the astonishingly ugly sofa everywhere—in the homes of the well-off and the otherwise, in hotel lobbies, office reception areas, furniture-store windows (of course), and, most spectacularly, on Egyptian television sitcom sets. One actor sits down on the couch and makes an exasperated face while the other actors gesticulate comically. I couldn't understand what was going on in Egyptian sitcoms, but I could tell it was more charming than Montel Williams.

I got to watch a lot of Egyptian TV, owing to a miscalculation in my attempt at cultural understanding. I'd arrived in Egypt in early December, in the middle of Ramadan. Not that Ramadan itself is hard to understand. It's a kind of Lent or extended Yom Kippur, with fasting from sunrise to sunset. Nothing is supposed to pass the lips, not even a smoke or a sip of water. And Egyptians, at least

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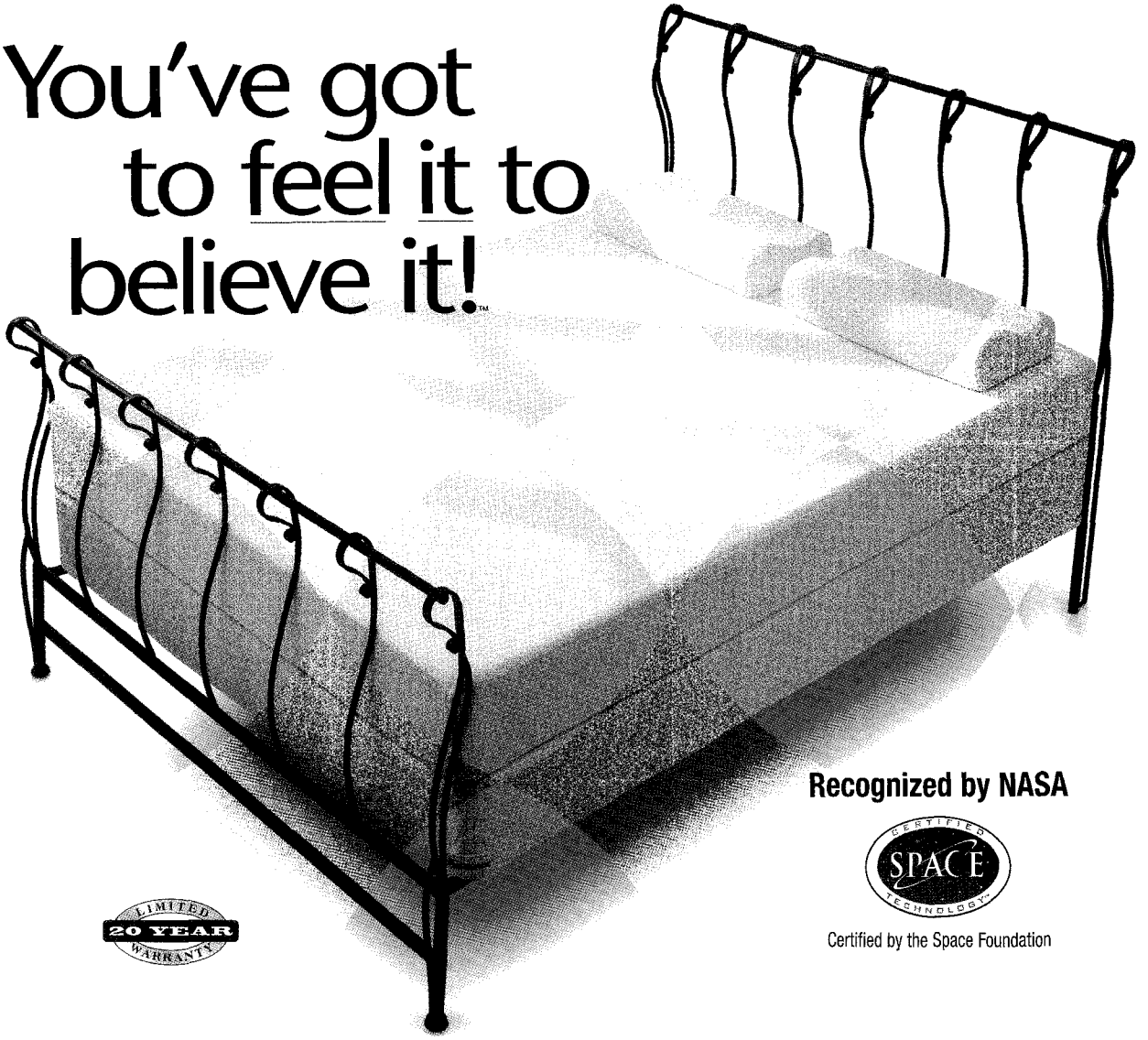

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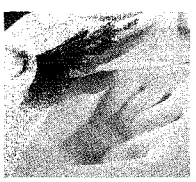

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in public, observe the rules. Clubs and discos are closed. Coffeehouses are empty. People in airport lounges are reading the Koran aloud. I was changing money when a call to midday prayer came from the PA system of the local mosque. The bank guard put his rifle aside, unrolled a rug, and performed his devotions. Fortunately, bank robbers were as pious and made no depredations. But Ramadan also has the aspect of a month-long Thanksgiving dinner with the family. When the sun goes down, everyone rushes home for the *iftar* feast. Another big meal, *suhour*, is served before dawn. There's a bit of Christmas, too, with shopping for toys and clothes to be given to children during the three days of the *eid al-fitr*, when the fasting is over. Stores are open at all hours of the night, and folks are out in the streets at three and four in the morning, children in tow. I'd been in Egypt for a week before I realized I was a diurnal creature in a nocturnal biosystem.

During the hours of daylight Egyptians are—considering that they're hungry, thirsty, and really wanting a cigarette—remarkably cheerful. That is, when they're awake. People sleep late. Arriving in Egypt during Ramadan is like arriving in an American small town on a holiday weekend about the time that the bowl games come on. Ramadan is, in fact, Egypt's peak television-viewing period. "Best TV Land is in Ramadan," I heard an announcer say as I surfed past what might have been an Arabic version of *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. The celebrity guests were sitting on an astonishingly ugly sofa.

The effusive, jolly ugliness of furniture suits a city that should be depressing but isn't. And the city ought to be squalid. It's an impoverished metropolis with a population density three times New York's. But Cairo is clean—if you don't count a sky that ranges in color from cheap-motel bed sheet to frightening diaper.

There's little begging, although plenty of *Whereyoufrom Youbuypostcardokay?* if you look like a tourist, and I do. Nobody is living on the street. The homeless, Peter explained, have teamed up with the lifeless. The city's huge Eastern and Southern Cemeteries are filled with house-sized mausoleums used as houses. The Egyptian government, surrendering to the perennial Cairo housing shortage, has provided the cemeteries with a modicum of water and electricity—a humane version of American big cities' just giving up and getting Target to provide the homeless with snappy Michael Graves–designed trash bags to sleep under.

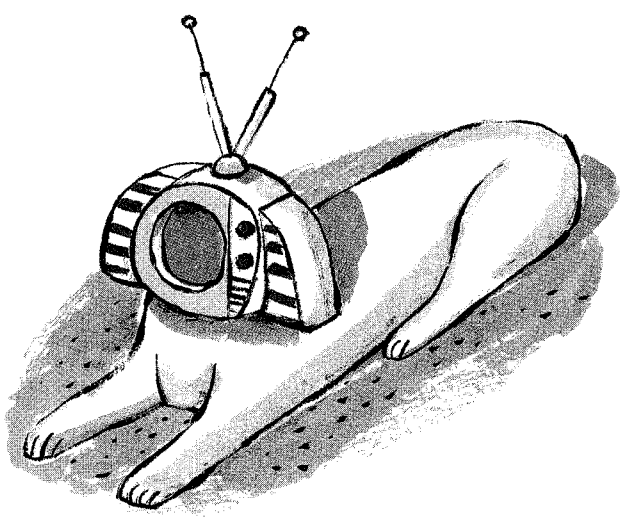
According to Peter, there are postmortem sublets in the so-called City of the Dead. The tenant of record's heirs charge rent to the viable occupants, who have to make themselves scarce on holidays and other special occasions, when bereaved families come to picnic or even spend the night with the deceased. Peter said there have been squatters among the tombs since the fourteenth century. But the taste for elaborate mausoleums goes back further in Egypt—and so, maybe, do the squats. Perhaps disaffected experimental colossus carvers, young barley-beer addicts, and aspiring scribes with papyrus sheets full of edgy new hieroglyphics had crash pads in the Great Pyramid of Khufu.

Peter and I went ten miles south to Memphis, the capital of Egypt during most of pharaonic times. For three and a half millennia Memphis was the most important city in the country. Then, in the tenth century, the Fatimid general Jauhar Al Rumi pillaged its stones to build Cairo. The dikes were neglected. And now Memphis is gone beneath the silt of the Nile.

But the former capital's necropolis, Saqqara, survives, marked by the Step Pyramid of Djoser. The Step Pyramid was completed about 2635 B.C. Peter said, "This was the world's first stone building."

I said, "In a country that's nothing but stone, with not a tree for miles, surely somebody ..."

"The ancient Egyptians," Peter said, "built their houses



out of mud and their tombs out of stone—to last for eternity." Most of Saqqara has collapsed into rubble.

Nearby is the Bent Pyramid. "This was the first pyramid of the true smooth-sided type," Peter said. To me it looked like a monument to middle-aged adultery—an affair begun with an aggressive angle of attack that couldn't be maintained. Apparently, building a pyramid was less straightforwardly Herculean than one might think. Peter explained, though not in these words, that there was more to it than making the top pointy so that the ancient Egyptians would know when to stop. Peter said the craft of pyramid building required a hundred years to perfect. Leaving five pharaohs under large but irregular piles of stuff.

We went into the tomb of Mereruka, son-in-law of Pharaoh Teti, who reigned from 2355 to 2343 B.C. This tomb was a mastaba, a flat-roofed stone building, with thirty-three rooms. Peter claimed that only royals were allowed to depict the gods in their burial chambers, so Mereruka decorated his with scenes from daily life. And what a life. Carved into the

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walls is a nice-looking family with plenty of household help. Frequent gourmet meals are served. There's surround-sound lute playing, many buff dancing girls, and goldsmiths coming up with something bound to placate the missus. Packs of happy naked kids—it must have been a progressive day-care center—play tug-of-war and Johnny-on-a-pony. Travel is as adventurous as anything in an Abercrombie & Kent brochure. Mereruka is shown spearing hippos (probably the bungee jumping of its day). And one whole wall is devoted to a lively illustration of revenue enhancement. Serf personnel are—to put it in modern terms—allowing their 401(k)s to be used to purchase the corporation's own stock (at the urging of supervisors with sticks).

Mereruka did well for himself while his wife's dad was running the show. I was looking at a recognizable yuppie paradise. Nothing here would have been strange to the Reagan merger-and-acquisition years or the dot-com boom. All it lacked was golf.

And yet I was also looking at thirty-three rooms of tomb, every one of which was to be filled with custom-made furniture, precious jewels, designer-label kilts and sandals, supermodel-endorsed eye kohl, vintage grand-cru palm-sap wine, and enough meals-to-go to last forever, not to mention archaeological treasures and priceless items of ancient Egyptian art. Plus there was that mummification, which probably cost more than a year at a spa.

Mereruka had invested the proceeds of his peak earning years in worm's meat. I was standing in what amounted to his Aspen ski lodge, his Hamptons beach house, his Gulfstream jet, the professional sports team he never owned, the college education of his kids. (And in the event, Mereruka's tomb was never finished. Teti's successor, Pepy I, may have been one of those churlish brothers-in-law determined to get the deadwood out of the family business.)

There's a temptation to think that understanding an ancient culture is easier, or at least less hectic, than understanding its modern offspring. The ancient culture holds still for inspection and doesn't produce mysterious new phenomena, such as Cairo.

But giant burial vaults can't have been an economically efficient investment of surplus capital. Riches could have been channeled into more-productive use. Channeled literally, as in digging a canal across the flatland between the Nile Delta and the Gulf of Suez. But none was dug until after Darius, the Persian Emperor, had conquered Egypt, in the sixth century B.C. Instead, when pharaohs wanted to trade along the Red Sea coast, they dismantled their boats, hauled them through the eastern desert, and put them back together. The Egyptians did not smelt iron. They didn't even discover bronze until the Middle Kingdom, a thousand years after the civilization was founded. Irrigation was accomplished with buckets on the ends of long levers or by carrying pots slung from yokes. The water wheel wasn't introduced until the Persian invasion. And before the Persians there wasn't such a thing as money. The ancient Egyptian technological innovation of note (besides the enormous triangular four-sided sepulchre stack) was papyrus paper. According to the Egyptologist Cyril Aldred, the ready availability of paper "made the highly organized Egyptian state possible." For the privilege of living in which the Egyptian peasantry paid 50 percent of its produce in taxes.

Even so, I felt that I emerged from Mereruka's tomb into a poorer, more woebegone country. Of course, I didn't. Modern Egypt has a per capita gross domestic product of $3,600. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development estimates that before the Industrial Revolution, world per capita GDP was about $650 (in 1990 dollars). In 1820 Great Britain was the richest country on earth with a per capita GDP of only $1,756. In wealth-per-person terms, merrie olde England was a Ghana. The ancient world seems rich to us because its DVDs of *Sex and the City* have survived rather than its kinescopes of *The Honeymooners*. And disparities in income, so shocking to our contemporary sensibilities, can't have been less. Consider the negative net worth of the slaves. They didn't have a title to, or even a mortgage on, themselves.

That said, in the fields and palm groves along the Nile are low mud houses of a kind unchanged since the days of Teti and Pepy. Identical homes are on display in miniature at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo—part of the Legoland of peasantry and servitude that was placed as an offering in a pharaoh's crypt.

These Nile-side domiciles, in contrast to the City of the Dead, have been supplied with few electrical wires. Running water has in fact been taken away. Nile floods are now contained by the Aswan High Dam, and Egypt's fellaheen must use commercial fertilizer to do the job that muck did for eons.

So the farmers in their millions move to Cairo, and between the remaining wattle-and-daub homesteads rise the weekend villas of plutocrat Cairenes. The villas would do credit to any gated community in Boca Raton. But the villas are the product of a path to success unfamiliar to Boca (if not to Mereruka). "Who can afford these places?" I asked Peter, who has a Ph.D. in Egyptology, as does his wife. They struggle to support two kids.

"Officials," he said. "And belly dancers."

Other paths to success are steeper. Peter took me to one of the numerous "carpet schools" along the Memphis-Giza road. Here children aged ten and up were engaged in—pedagogical alibis and apprenticeship hooey aside—child labor. Also, some of the children looked more like eight than ten.

There was nothing Dickensian about the well-lit, swept, and airy ground floor full of looms. The manager said that the boys and girls were paid "to give them encouragement" and that "maybe they'll be able to get a job in the company's factory." But I had a feeling this *was* the factory. He assured

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me that his charges receive academic instruction similar to that in the government schools. And maybe they do. Scribbled on one weaving frame was graffiti in English that read, "I will always be looling you." I watched little-kid fingers move with blurring speed among warp and woof and saw little-kid faces puckered in grim expertise. I'll never buy a handmade rug again.

Although I bought one. Small, expectant eyes were upon me. "September eleven is like a black day to us," the manager said. Is rug weaving really any worse than Play Station II? Maybe not; but since I got back from Egypt, wall-to-wall carpet made on automatic machines by unionized labor is looking better—the orange shag kind included.

To blame the existence of al Qaeda on poverty like Egypt's is a slur on the poor. The September 11 attackers were taking flying lessons in America, not rug-weaving lessons in a village on the Nile. Yet there must be some economic, or political-economic, roots to the burning —flaming, bursting, exploding—bush of current events. Fouad Ajami, the author of *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* and a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, has written, "Atta struck at us because he could not take down Mr. Mubarak's world, because in the burdened, crowded land of the Egyptian dictator there is very little offered younger Egyptians save for the steady narcotic of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism."

Narcotics aside, this "very little offered" raises a question about Arab culture. Why has Egypt—and the whole Arab world—made relatively little economic progress? Even the oil-flush Gulf states have not become rich the way we understand rich in the West. Kuwait is little more than an oil spigot with people sitting on top, and all they have to do is turn the tap. But Kuwait's per capita GDP is $15,000, whereas utterly resourceless Luxembourg's is $36,400.

Egypt of yore may have been economically sclerotic, but modern Egyptians can't really blame their ancient civilization. At least they *had* a civilization, which is more than we did—or, to judge by Jenny Jones, do yet. And Islam didn't destroy that civilization any more than the Ptolemites, the Romans, and the Byzantines had before. The capitulation of Egypt to the Arabs was brokered by the Christian Patriarch of Alexandria in 642, on condition of security for persons and property and with religious freedom guaranteed in return for payment of tribute.

The Arab world began with a number of economic advantages besides tribute. It had a common language, a unified government, and territory that sat athwart the trade from the Orient to the Mediterranean, between the Mongols and the deep blue sea. To move goods by any other route was to risk getting very wet, or dying. The obligation of pilgrimage stimulated commerce and encouraged the general public to travel the way nothing else would until the invention of frequent-flyer miles and Disney World. A measure of law and order existed, unlike in Europe, where there was none, and in China, where there was too much. And Arabs had absorbed the learning of Greco-Roman civilization centuries before Europeans, in their Renaissance, began to pick scraps of it out of the ruin they'd made of Greece and Rome. Also, the Islamic religion has the right attitude. In the Koran, Sura II, verse 275, states, "God hath permitted trade." The Koran orders the use of honest weights and measures, the fulfillment of contracts, and the payment of debts. And one of the sayings attributed to Muhammad makes him not just the Prophet of Allah but the prophet of Adam Smith: "Only God can fix prices."

But something went wrong. How did the Arabs fall behind Europe, America, and now the Far East? It was probably nothing so air-filled as "the experimental model and European rational thought" or "the Protestant work ethic" or "Confucian values." Civilizations, like people, trip over smaller things. The answer may be as boring as a real-estate title search.

Caliphs and sultans did not bestow feudal lands on a hereditary nobility. Fiefs were generally temporary. Land was given to a particular person for a certain time in return for military or other services. Agricultural estates were your salary. You got a raise by squeezing everything you could out of them. And you had to do it quickly, before you lost your job. There was no incentive to invest in the land, much less in the people who tilled it. This was a carnival concession. You were never going to see these rubes again.

The dearth of private land in the Islamic world is of a piece with the excessive government centralization that has always plagued the civilizations of the Fertile Crescent. Farming in much of the area requires irrigation, a horribly communal activity, like being trapped in an endless Amish barn raising. Then the people of the region went and invented writing. Writing is the enabler of bureaucracy. Bureaucracy leads to the Department of Motor Vehicles model of government, with patronage jobs, wire pulling, and a political hack of a boss.

The Muslim conquerors of the Fertile Crescent may have come from independent and roughly democratic Arab tribes, but they quickly glommed on to state power, as did their Seljuk and Ottoman Turk successors. Despite the laissez-faire prescriptions of the Koran, and the Prophet's warnings against price controls, the Islamic state proceeded to interfere grossly with the economy. The pre-eminent Western historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, estimates that Middle Eastern agricultural yields began a decline in late Roman times that has continued almost to the present day. As for commerce, Lewis has written, "Governments seemed to have reasoned that if they could earn so much a year by taxing the pepper trade, they could earn even more by taking it over entirely." This works so well in Cuba. Lewis argues that Islamic commercial wealth was not destroyed by European innovations in ocean shipping. Rather, Europeans were driven to the sea

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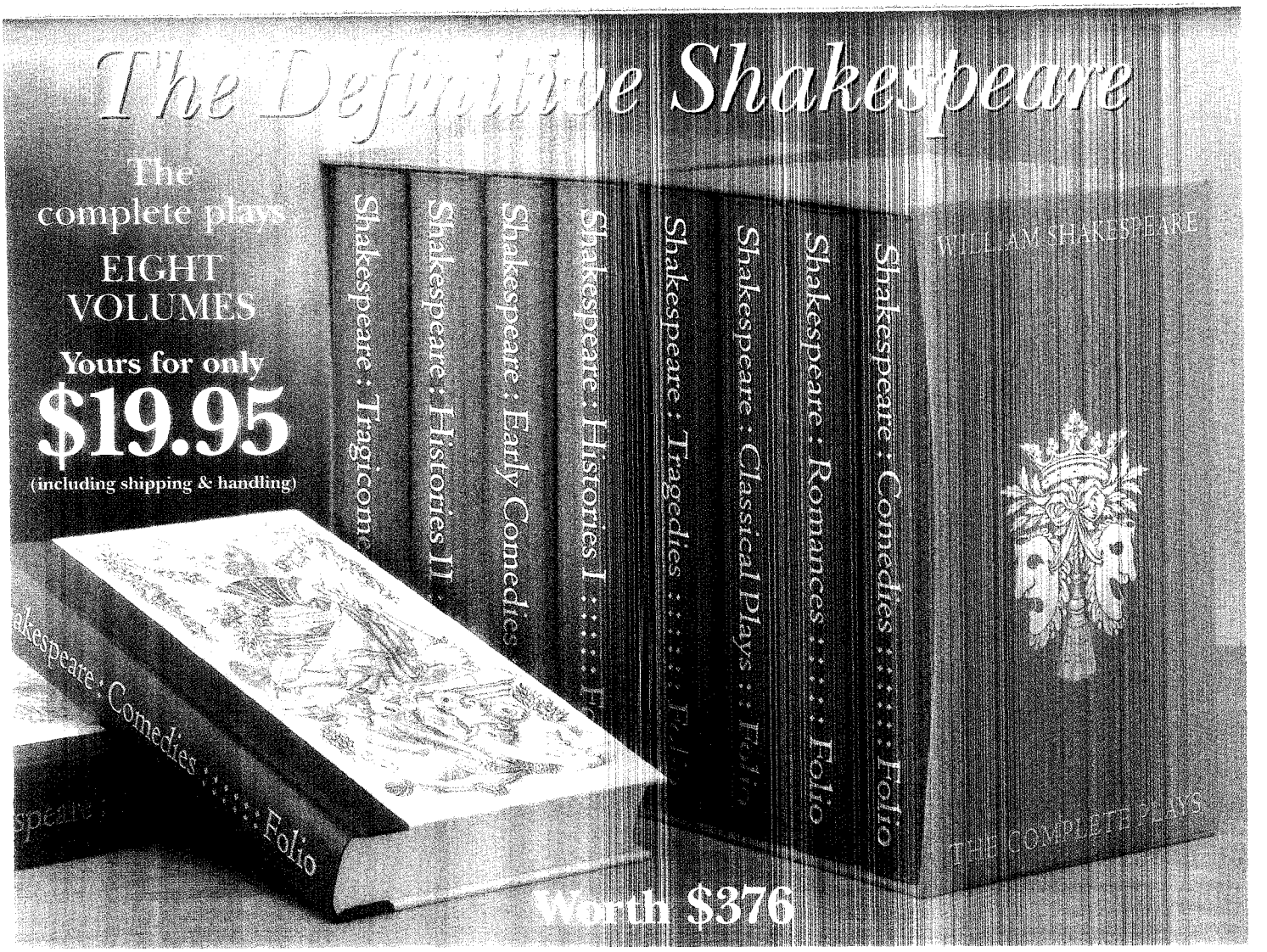

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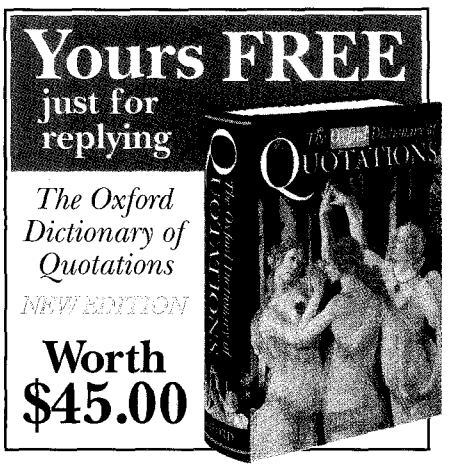

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lanes because in the 1400s the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt nationalized the spice trade and forced the Kmart of nutmeg-and-ginger caravans into Chapter 11.

The economic decline can be measured by the number of people the economy was able to support. The Egyptian historian Afaf Marsot believes that the population of Egypt at the time of the Arab conquest was 20 to 30 million. By the late 1700s it was about three million.

Mamluk Sultan–ish behavior persisted into the modern era. Gamal Abdel Nasser ruled Egypt from 1952 to 1970, and his political slogan said everything that can be said about centralization: "We are all Nasser." He nationalized banks, insurance companies, and other major enterprises. Land ownership was limited to around forty acres, about the size of the plot on which the average peasant was starving. Imports were radically reduced, and a broad program of "import substitution" was effected. I'll have a McGoat and a large order of papyrus fries. Marsot says of the Nasser regime, "The real administration was carried out through exceptional decrees, through patron-client relationships, through appeals to individuals in power."

Sounds like Enron to me. But Alan Greenspan says America's economy is doing okay. And so, to some extent, is Egypt's. Reforms and privatizations were begun by Anwar Sadat and have continued under Hosni Mubarak. Egypt's GDP grew by an average of 5.05 percent a year from 1997 to 2000. I had dinner with some Egyptians in the steel business. Their business talk sounded like any business talk. When they discussed the downturn in structural-steel demand resulting from global recession and the September 11 attacks, they may have meant "We are all Nasser"—but what they said was "We are all dead." Though considering the size of the restaurant check they picked up, they didn't really mean it.

Shopkeepers, though glum about the current situation, did not seem to be in a mood of permanent despair. I spent a pleasant hour in the Khan al-Khalili bazaar lounging atop rolls of brilliantly striped Egyptian canvas talking to a maker of drawstring pokes and backpacks. He was interested to hear about the L. L. Bean boat bag and how there are people called WASPs in America who can't so much as send a kid and the nanny to the beach club without employing three or four of these stiff cotton sacks.

I had lunch with an Egyptian who had been born in the United States. When he was in high school, in suburban Chicago, he became serious about religion and observed Ramadan with rigor. Then he went to Egypt to work as a journalist, and now, in Ramadan, he was having lunch. "My sister is a Christian fundamentalist," I said. "She wouldn't crash a plane into the World Trade Center, but she might land pretty hard on evolution. And then we'd all have to remain amoebas."

"A lot of people don't make that connection," the Egyptian journalist from Chicago said.

But the movement of Egypt's material culture into the modern age is not happening fast enough to simply turn them into us. (And since I began watching Maury Povich, I'm not sure I want it to.) Also, a small item in the December 10, 2001, edition of *The Egyptian Gazette* indicates that the fatal bull's-eye of centralization remains pinned to the Egyptian economy. "Minister of Planning Othman Mohammed Othman," the item read, "said the government was unable to manage the economy alone." Plus, Egypt continues to suffer from the corruption that's bred when profit lies down with politics. Transparency International's 2001 Corruption Perceptions Index rates Egypt 3.6 on a scale of 10, with 10 being the least corrupt. Finland is 9.9. Drug-lord-beleaguered Colombia, at 3.8, is less corrupt than Egypt.

Five millennia of economic tomfoolery is bound to leave Egyptians confused about economic principles. On the subject of free trade M. Ali Ibrahim, who writes the front-page "Tell Me More" column for *The Egyptian Gazette*, can sound like Pat Buchanan on a bad chest-hair day. "Immediate restrictions must be introduced to drastically reduce imports," Ibrahim wrote on December 5, 2001. "We waste millions of dollars on provocative imported commodities, dog food, nuts and ice cream." Ibrahim cited the work of Mahmoud Bazaraa, "an economics expert" who claims "that a liberal economy doesn't mean opening wide the doors for imports." A few days later Ibrahim's column was titled "Tell Me More ... About imported prayer beads, how they're bankrupting local merchants."

"In the United States," I said to Peter, "we're worried about Egyptian Islamic extremism. So what's with all the crosses on the Cairo skyline?"

"I'm Christian," Peter said. The owners of his tour company are also Christians, as are most of its employees.

"How many Egyptians are Christian?" I asked.

"Many," Peter said, "but I don't know how many."

Most Egyptian Christians are members of the Coptic Church. Fouad Ajami writes, "The demographic weight of the Copts is one of the great riddles of Egypt." Ajami quotes the political historian Rifaat Said, who says, "We count everything in Egypt: cups, shoes, books. The only thing we don't count are the Copts." Copts make up six percent of the Egyptian population (the official estimate) or 10 percent (the historian Afaf Marsot's estimate) or 12 percent (the estimate from the Center for Religious Freedom, in Washington, D.C.) Only 11 percent of Swedes go to church. Egypt may be a more Christian country than Sweden.

Copts believe that the nature of Jesus Christ was completely divine. Other Christians believe that the nature of Jesus was both divine and human. This used to be something you could get killed over. And it still is. Muslims believe that the nature of Jesus was just plain human. Islamic-extremist violence has been aimed at fellow Egyptians as well as at foreign tourists. In January of 2000, in the

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town of Al-Kosheh, anti-Copt rioting resulted in the death of twenty-two Christians and one Muslim.

But Afaf Marsot claims that the Copts were treated better by their Muslim conquerors than by their Byzantine overlords, who considered them heretics. Copts were incorporated into the Arab government. Bernard Lewis says that as late as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Muslims were complaining that Copts were running the administration. They're still there. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a Copt, was Mubarak's deputy prime minister for foreign affairs before becoming Secretary-General of the UN.

Peter took me to the Coptic quarter of Cairo. We saw a welter of Christian worship going on—although it was a weekday—and more than a few Santa decorations. Peter showed me where Pharaoh's daughter found Moses floating in a basket. The basement grotto *was* flooded, so this may have been the spot. No, I'm getting mixed up in my notes. The flooded grotto was the place where Jesus and Mary and Joseph sought shelter on their flight into Egypt. I hope

they brought galoshes. The Church of Saint Sergius, one of the oldest Christian churches in Egypt, was constructed over the grotto, in the fifth century. To support one end of a door lintel in the church a Roman column was used with its capital flat on the floor—in case you think it's only Muslims who turn civilization upside down.

The place where Moses was found is in the Ben Ezra Synagogue, which is no longer used for daily worship. "Fewer than a hundred Jews are left in Egypt," Peter said. "All of them are over seventy. There are maybe twenty synagogues in Egypt. Only one is open."

When Ben Ezra was restored in the nineteenth century, thousands of manuscripts were discovered, dating back to the eleventh century. "It is the habit of the Jews all over the world," Peter said, "to write the story of their lives and hide these writings in certain places." I was thinking of Anne Frank, but I don't believe Peter was. He talked about "the closed society of the Jews" and said, "We do not forget the help the Jews gave the Hyksos." These were the pharaohs of the Fifteenth Dynasty, apparently of Semitic origin, who ruled Egypt after the fall of the Middle Kingdom, 3,650 years ago. Peter was still irked. "The Jews came to Egypt three times," he said, frowning, "with Joseph, with Ptolemy, and in 1492." By the way, they were moderately well treated on each occasion—although there seems to have been a flare-up of ill feeling about the time of Exodus. And now, of course.

The big hit from Egypt's pop singer of the moment, Shaaban Abdel Rahim, is "Ana Bakrah Israel" ("I Hate Israel"). Rahim says the cassette has sold five million copies. In a week's worth of *Egyptian Gazette*s, each edition only eight to twelve pages long, I counted fifty-eight articles involving Israel. The December 12, 2001, issue alone had five, three of them on the front page. One piece, on December 10, cited "rumours that Mossad agents have secretly hidden magnetic strips inside Cleopatra cigarettes." The story noted that "strong electromagnetic fields are a health risk" and went on to mention "'lethal' magnetic belt buckles, seen as an Israeli plot to make Egyptians sterile."

The Egyptian Gazette, which the Lonely Planet guide calls "Egypt's awful daily English-language newspaper," is an anodyne (and anti-Osama) publication that turns up outside hotel-room doors in the morning and is clearly meant to be read by foreigners, some of whom are likely to be Jewish. Much worse things are available from the Arab-language press, as is pointed out by The Middle East Media and Research Institute, a pro-Israel organization that collects much worse things from the Arab-language press.

According to MEMRI, the following items appeared in the Egyptian government dailies *Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Ahram* from April to August of 2001:

Mahmoud Mahmoud Muhammad Khadhr, a cleric from Cairo's Al-Azhar University, posed the rhetorical question "Did Hitler attack the Jews or did their crime deserve even more? ... The Zionists were a fifth column in Germany, and they betrayed the country that hosted them."

Dr. Mahmoud Al-Said Al-Kurdi stated, "The Talmud, the second holiest book for the Jews, determines that the 'matzahs' of Atonement Day must be kneaded 'with blood' from a non-Jew. The preference is for the blood of youths after raping them!!"

And the journalist Fahmi Huweidi described his feelings after a suicide bombing: "I cannot hide my happiness about the martyrdom operation that took place in Jerusalem last Thursday. I won't deny that it liberated me from the sorrow and misery that have overtaken me over the past weeks."

Fouad Ajami's "narcotic of anti-Zionism" packs a punch.

And maybe so does poetic license. In *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*, Ajami explains that Arab society puts a great value on poetic expression—a 1950s-Smith-College-girl-with-her-head-in-the-oven value. In the March 10, 2002, *New York Times Book Review*, Judith Shulevitz wrote about

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Osama bin Laden's recitation of poetry on one of his videotapes (a poem plagiarized from the Jordanian poet Yusuf Abu Hilalah). Shulevitz said that this recitation "would burnish bin Laden's reputation in a way that Americans might not readily understand, given the higher premium placed in the Middle East on poetic eloquence, even in a political leader." And it is hard to imagine George W. Bush cribbing from Sylvia Plath in his post–September 11 address to the joint session of Congress:

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

Ajami quotes the poet Nizar Qabbani, who said that the Arab is the "quintessential poetic being," and that poetry is "written on the forehead of every Arab." Anyone who has had a similar experience of letting his words get ahead of his frontal lobes knows where this can lead. Maybe, in the calumnies of *Al-Akhbar*, there is a kinship to Plath's poem "Daddy," in which she addressed her father: "Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You—" Otto Plath was a Boston University professor of biology and an expert on bees.

Or maybe what we're hearing in *Al-Akhbar* is prosaic hate. But either way, the reality is that it's been almost thirty years since the last war between Egypt and Israel. Americans in my parents' generation were pretty mad at the Japs. They got over it. And by the 1970s they were driving Datsuns.

I flew to Luxor. Trying to understand a culture by being a tourist is famously useless. But trying to understand Egypt without being a tourist would be worse than useless. Egypt is the cradle of tourism. Herodotus was a tourist here in the fifth century B.C. And the First Dynasty of the pharaohs was as far removed in time from Herodotus as he is from us. Tourism was the source of history's original failure of cultural understanding. Cyril Aldred writes that ancient Greek and Roman vacationers in Egypt "never really understood Egyptian religion and were inclined to see in inexplicable acts and beliefs a more profound significance than actually existed." Thus the concept of the "inscrutable Orient," the idea of the "mysterious East."

Luxor is the site of the ancient sacred city of Thebes, 419 miles upstream from Cairo. The Temple of Luxor is downtown, and nearby are the Colossi of Memnon, Karnak Temple, Hatshepsut's Temple, the Valley of the Kings, the Valley of the Queens, and the Ramesseum, with the gigantic shattered statue of Ramses II that inspired Shelley to write "Ozymandias."

And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck other than ticket booths,
soda-pop stands, souvenir stalls, dozing guards,
and 200 men in galabias asking,
"Whereyoufrom Youbuypostcardokay?"

At the Sheraton hotel in Luxor a few tourists were braving the geopolitics—some Europeans, a couple of Japanese, and a scattering of doughty American retirees of the type who can't get along without L. L. Bean boat bags. I heard a voice in the Sheraton bar saying, with a plummy English accent, "The reason *I* got fired ..."

My guide in Luxor, Ibrahim, was one of those people—rare among tour guides—who are impelled to tell the truth. His description of the mummification process was sickening. I asked Ibrahim about the war on terror. "Egyptians support America's actions in Afghanistan," he said, and paused. "Most do. But I must tell you the truth, others do not. Maybe thirty percent do. I am Christian. All Christians support America's actions." He paused again. "But maybe ninety percent of Egyptians are opposed."

Luxor's tombs and temples were interesting—briefly. Ibrahim *would* recount the attributes, the ancestry, and the avatars of every mythological figure portrayed. He came to a brief, embarrassed halt only at Min, who is represented with a healthy erection. And so Min might well be represented, given the lithesome and un-burka'd female deities on the tomb and temple walls. The ancient Egyptian pantheon seems to have read Amazon.com's best seller *Look Great Naked* in an earlier edition.

But the mild thrill of anachronistic eroticism wears off, the gimmick of puppy-headed gods palls, and a satiety with ritual mumbo-jumbo sets in. Too much Egyptian art in a day produces moods that go rapidly from Hobbit-jaded to child-wizard-bored to the feeling of being in a vegetarian restaurant with a blind date who's talking feng shui. Ibrahim took me to just such a restaurant near the Valley of the Kings, although it became vegetarian only after Ibrahim suggested I look in the kitchen.

From the restaurant's terrace I could also look up and down the Nile. The land of Egypt is nearly 700 miles long and, for most of that distance, effectively about seven miles wide. How did this affect a culture? Did people try to make their lives long and narrow? The funerary monuments around Luxor are a huge pharaonic Keogh plan meant to fund an eternal hereafter just like the therebefore.

I could be wrong. What will be left of our civilization 5,000 years hence? Probably the ruins of our interstate highway system. The tourists of some future age will wonder, as I wondered at the Valley of the Kings, "Why were these people so obsessed with where they were going instead of where they were?"

But our rest stops won't present the same opportunities for looting. ("A Jersey Devils snow dome!") All the ancient Egyptian tombs were robbed, many by contemporaries of the deceased. Even the famed trove of Tutankhamun was picked over not long after it was sealed. Suspicions arise of an inside job. A pharaoh's kids had motive, means, and opportunity.

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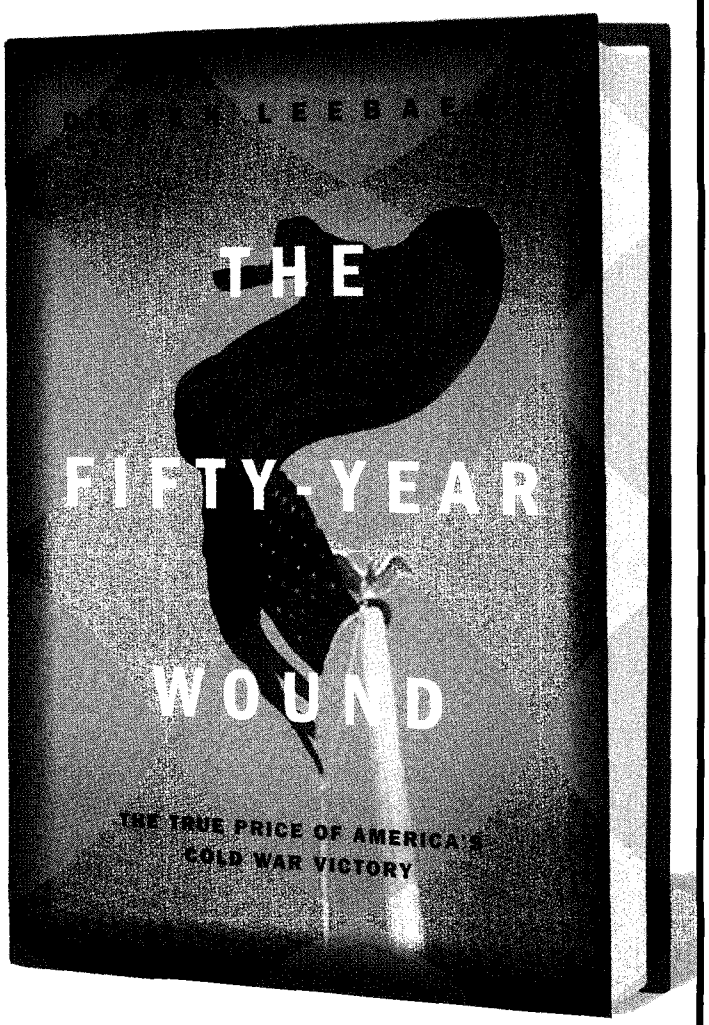

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They'd been bilked of their inheritance, knew where the tomb was, and were paying the salaries of the guards.

"Didn't Grandpa have a set of solid-gold dinner plates just like this?"

"Finish your papyrus fries."

Nowadays the tombs are well protected. And so are their visitors. After the 1997 terrorist attack at Hatshepsut's Temple, the corps of black-clad Tourist Police was expanded and given special training. I saw one of them sitting in a squad car with a Furby hanging from the rearview mirror.

The Tourist Police were present in force at the Karnak temple complex. Karnak covers almost as much ground as Disneyland. The Great Hypostyle Hall alone has space enough for a heck of an Ancient Egyptian Adventure ride—whizzing among the 134 gigantic stone pillars. Indeed, visitors once came to Karnak with a more Disney-fied attitude. According to the scrapbooks of nineteenth-century tourists, there's room for a hundred men to stand on the capital of one of these columns. That was the kind of culturally in-

sensitive thing tourists used to do. Now they're herded into sound-and-light shows.

The Karnak *son et lumière* began with Wagnerian music and recorded male and female voices bouncing back and forth between widely separated speakers in the manner of sound-effects records from the early days of stereo. I forget what the female voice was pretending to be. The male voice was Amon-Ra—a Middle Kingdom syncretism of Ra the sun deity and a local goose god, the Great Cackler, who laid the cosmic egg.

The language of the performance was as poetic as anything that bin Laden is snapping his fingers to in the coffeehouses of the Shah-i-Kot Valley. "I am Amon-Ra," the male voice said. "The waters of the Nile sprout from my sandals." The *lumière* part consisted mostly of plunging us into darkness while we hung around in the supposedly spiritual ruins. Some of the tourists took flash photos of the opacity. "Yes, definitely spirits," I heard one woman say.

A Ramadan service was being broadcast over the loudspeaker of a mosque outside the Karnak walls. The *son et lumière* producers turned up their volume. The Muslim clerics turned up theirs. The producers responded in kind. So did the clerics.

If the pious Muslims had had Ibrahim translating the *son et lumière* into Arabic, there might have been more than a war of words. "I am the father of fathers, mother of mothers," Amon-Ra announced very loudly indeed, "... the salvation of Amon, the salvation of Ra, also the salvation of the crocodile, offered equally to all the compass points of earth and to you, new pilgrim to Thebes."

I was reminded of nothing so much as my dad in a fez, headed out for a night with the boys. Dad was a Thirty-second Degree Freemason and a member of the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. It's hard to imagine a worse case of cultural misunderstanding than the cultures of Egypt and Arabia represented by Dad on a midget motorcycle in the Fourth of July parade. Or maybe Dad knew more than I thought. During the late nineteenth century Egypt's King Tawfiq was a member of a Masonic lodge, as were many of Egypt's reform-minded liberal elite.

The next night I visited the Temple of Luxor, mercifully in silence. Luxor was consecrated to the "Theban Triad": Amon-Ra; his earth-mother consort, Mut; and their moon-god kid, Khonsu. The temple was constructed about 1300 B.C. and restored by Alexander the Great, who built a new sanctuary for Amon-Ra. "In the wrong place," Ibrahim said. "Properly it should be in the last room of the temple, not here in the antechamber." Alexander's sanctuary stands just inside the antechamber's original walls. One set of hieroglyphs and reliefs was carved a thousand years later than the other.

"You see the difference," Ibrahim said.

I didn't. There is a supposed dynamism to ancient Egyptian art. According to Cyril Aldred, "It is often possible for the expert to date a specimen to within a few years by its stylistic features alone." So the expert says. But the ancient Egyptian language, Aldred himself points out, "has no genuine active tense." He notes that the ancient Egyptians did not adjust their calendar with the addition of an extra day every four years. They just let it slide for a millennium and a half until it got back into phase. When it came to art, I think the ancient Egyptians had a look going and decided to hang with it for 3,000 years.

"Notice how the quality of decoration degenerated," Ibrahim said. An important part of cultural understanding is to understand that not all cultures progress.

Ibrahim and I went across the street and had dinner at McDonald's, where the quality of decoration had degenerated much further.

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THE TREATMENT

A short story

BY ROXANA ROBINSON

Illustration by Melissa Grimes

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Here is what I do each morning. As soon as I wake up, barefoot and still in my nightgown, as though I were on the way to my lover, I go downstairs to the darkened kitchen. I'm alone in the house: my husband leaves early, my daughter is away at college. I don't bother to turn on the lights. I go straight to the refrigerator and open the door to its icy glare. From the refrigerator I take a chilled golden globe, the size of a small orange. It's made of firm and springy plastic, and it's solid, with some heft. The pearly outer sheathing is translucent, obscuring the glowing interior and giving it a muffled shimmer. I set the globe, with its neat coil of attached tubing, on the kitchen counter. For the next three hours it will lie there, slowly warming, so that when the fluid inside enters my vein, it will be not cold and torpid but swift and potent. What's inside the radiant globe is Rocephin, a powerful antibiotic, which will cure me.

When you are not ill, when you are well, you think about yourself in a particular way. You take being well for granted: that is who you are. You are someone who does not have to think about her body. Not having to think about your body is a luxury, but since you have always had it, you aren't aware that it's a luxury. When you think about sick people, you think of them as different from you, set apart in some unspecified way: they are Other. They are beyond a mysterious divide. They are branded somehow, in a way you don't consider much. Even if you do consider it, you can't get very far. Why are other people sick? Why are you not? There are no reasons; there is no logic. Things are the way they are. In some interior, subliminal place you believe that you deserve your health. The person you are, it seems, deserves to be healthy, just as the person you are seems to deserve two legs, a nose. I had two legs, a nose, my health.

Ten days ago the line was introduced into my vein. I lay on a narrow examining table at the doctor's office, waiting while the nurse assembled her instruments. She was pleasant and perky, rather glamorous, with long blonde hair and gleaming red fingernails. I lay perfectly still. I was prepared for everything, anything; nothing she did would distress me. This was the initiation ceremony, the start of the healing. It was frightening, but I welcomed it, whatever terror it held. I was embracing the source of my fear. The treatment would be my salvation.

The nurse pulled up my sleeve and exposed the white skin on the inside of my left elbow, the sacrificial site. She cleaned it and laid it down, bare, beside the row of instruments. She took up a length of tubing, like a long, transparent snake. Casually she measured this against me—from elbow to shoulder, across under my collarbone, and then down to just above my heart. Here the mouth of the snake would dangle for six weeks.

When the nurse was ready to begin, she paused and looked up at my face. "You're going to feel a pinch," she warned.

I nodded. I knew that "pinch" was code for pain. The nurse looked back down, and I turned my head away. I stared at the square white tiles in the ceiling while she worked, piercing my skin, invading my body. I could feel her movements. I didn't look.

"I hate when it spurts," I heard her say crossly. "Now it's all over the rug."

I said nothing. I didn't turn to look. No part of the treatment would trouble me; this is what would save me. I stared at the cross-hatching on the tiles while she slid the snake into my vein and sent it up the length of my upper arm, through the widening veins across the top of my chest, and down to the great thunderous vessel directly

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above my poor heart. I said nothing. This would save me.

Taking pills three times a day is meaningless. Anyone can do it; people do it all the time. The act has no implications. You are simply correcting something, an aberration. Having a plastic tube inserted into your bloodstream, dangling over your heart, is different. It is a violation of your deepest recesses. It moves you into a darker, more dangerous place. It means you are ill, and helpless.

After three months the oral antibiotics had stopped working, and I went back to my doctor. We sat in his office, which is pleasantly cluttered in a domestic way. It has a bright hooked rug on the floor, a tall standing bookshelf, and a big ficus tree with glossy leaves in front of the window. Dr. Kennicott has no desk; he sits in a brown-plaid wing chair. When he wants to write a prescription, he sets a polished wooden board across his lap.

Dr. Kennicott is a quiet man with a kindly manner, slightly bohemian. He has mournful brown eyes and shaggy graying hair and sideburns. He wears a white lab coat, khaki pants, and black-leather running shoes. He sat in the wing chair, and I sat in a smaller chair across from him.

"My neck is stiff again," I said. "I can't turn my head any further than this." I had more to report: the symptoms were back. As I talked, Dr. Kennicott frowned sympathetically, his sad eyes attentive. His elbows were set on the arms of the chair, his fingers steepled just under his chin. When I finished, he nodded slowly. "That often happens," he announced.

This puzzled and disappointed me: then why had we used that treatment? I'd never before been to a doctor who prescribed something that he knew often didn't work. I'd never been to a doctor who didn't just fix what was wrong.

"Then what do we do now?" I asked.

Dr. Kennicott pushed out his lips thoughtfully. "I'd suggest moving on to intravenous antibiotics."

"No," I said at once.

I knew about intravenous—he'd mentioned it before. I didn't want it. It was too serious, too alarming. I told him it wasn't justified: I wasn't that ill. I was basically healthy, I told him. Other people have this disease and are treated for it and recover completely. That happened to my daughter: she was treated for it at once, and now she seems fine. I am basically fine, I told him.

The doctor said nothing while I explained this. He said nothing when I stopped. He sat in the wing chair, his hands steepled under his chin. He watched me quietly, waiting for me to understand. Finally I stopped and looked at him, alarm dawning.

To understand that you are seriously ill is to cross over into a different country. You are apart from other people now. Something separates you from them, something you cannot change. The realization is like a fall from a great height. You are silenced. You have no recourse. You cannot help yourself. Your body has failed you, and you are helpless. You must change your expectations of all things. You must put yourself in the hands of the healers. They may fail.

When I understood this, I fell silent. I was in a new place. Things were not as I had thought; arguing with the doctor was useless.

This disease, like syphilis, is carried by spirochetes. We have reason to think that the spirochetes have been in my bloodstream for a decade, for who knows how long. Now, apparently, these spirochetes have set up their malign outposts all through my body. They're in my nervous system, my muscles, the connective tissue inside my joints, my spinal cord. They have stiffened my neck and my shoulders. They have turned my muscles leaden and my limbs resistant, so that when I move, I feel as if I were struggling against an invisible network of tightening bonds. The spirochetes may even have infiltrated the tender, private whorls inside my cranial basin. This idea is so frightening, though, that I don't allow myself to think about it. I don't permit myself to slide into that well of terror. I can't afford to.

The treatment frightens me too, but I can't afford that fear either. I've given myself up to this, like a postulant giving up her soul to God. I'm allying myself with this larger power. The treatment will be my salvation. I can't afford to believe otherwise.

This morning, when the moment for the infusion arrives, I go back to the kitchen from my study. I'm dressed now, in jeans and a sweater. I work at home, getting my doctorate in early childhood development. I've finished the coursework and am writing my dissertation, which means that I don't have to explain to anyone why I now spend every morning at home, unavailable to the world, engaged in a private and fearsome activity.

At the sink I wash my hands with a liquid anti-microbial soap, a surgical scrub. It has a thin, acrid smell, and afterward my skin feels raw. This is proper; this is part of the ritual. I am preparing myself for the secret chamber. My movements now are precise. From my big box of medical supplies, from my zip-locked plastic bags, I take three blunt-nosed syringes. The two white-capped ones hold saline solution, which will be injected before and after the Rocephin, to clean the tubing. The yellow-capped syringe holds heparin, a mild anti-coagulant. This goes in last, so that the blood idling in the tubing between treatments will not form clots. I lay all these things out beside the globe. The instruments are ready.

I pull up the sweater on my left arm. Clasped along the inside of my elbow is a white elastic fishnet sleeve that holds the apparatus tight against my skin. I slide this off, letting a translucent line of tubing uncoil downward into the air. One end of this is taped flat to my skin in a serpentine loop before it disappears into my flesh. The other end, interrupted by a small, transparent junction box, ends in a blue valve. This is called a Clave, and it is shaped like the

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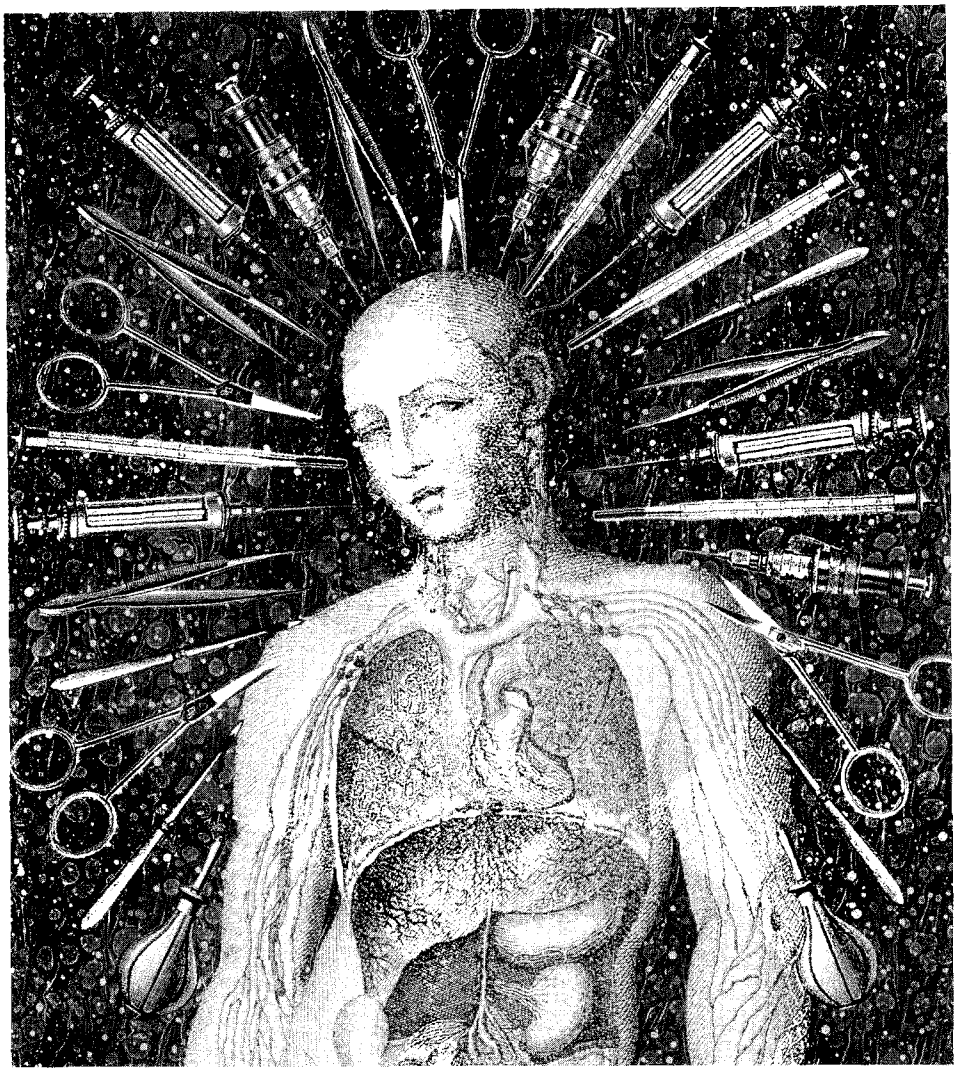

head of a lizard, narrowing and blunt-nosed. I open a foil packet holding an antiseptic swab, and its sharp alcohol odor blooms in the air, powerful and sobering. With a little bad luck any germ I carry at this moment will be transported directly to my heart.

Carefully I swab the surface of the Clave. Holding it aloft, sterile, with one hand, I unscrew a white-capped syringe with the other. I screw the threaded nose of the syringe into the Clave. On the line of tubing is a triangular cock, and I slide the tubing free of it. The line into my vein is now open.

I press down on the plunger. The loaded syringe holds two and a half milliliters of saline solution. I watch the solution creep down the coil to where the tube vanishes under the surface of my skin, and the liquid enters my body. I can feel its cold arrival in my vein. I press the plunger slowly down until I reach the flattened air bubble at the bottom of the shaft. I unscrew the syringe and set it down. Still holding the Clave in the air, I unscrew the small cap on the Rocephin line and set its transparent nose into the opening of the Clave. Like the syringe, it screws neatly in. This connection feels smooth and satisfying, and I am gratified by it, as though such technical perfection means that the treatment will work in just this beautifully engineered way.

I sit down and lean back. Now I'm connected. The valves are open, the liquid has begun its journey into my body. The golden globe is pressurized; for the next forty minutes it will slowly contract, forcing the Rocephin steadily into my bloodstream.

I close my eyes. My part in this is like prayer: I concentrate on what is taking place inside me; I visualize it. I see the golden tide beginning its silent warrior's surge, past the heart and through the wide channels of the great arteries, the smaller ones of the arterioles, moving deep into the interior, into the narrow waterways of the capillaries. I see the golden tide moving into a still lagoon. Calm water on pale sand. The movement is visible, a low, relentless surge. Along the irregular shore a ripple breaks in a narrow line of foam. I hear a sighing hiss, a small, seething commotion: the spirochetes, the tiny corkscrews of the disease, are sizzling in a frenzy of death. I hear them thrashing; I see the surface of the water along the shore boil and churn as they jitter. They twist and sputter as it hits them. They are dying, dying in droves, dying by the millions, at the touch of the smooth golden surge.

During my first week of the treatment I had the predicted reactions: high fever; chills and headaches; brief, wild, stabbing pains in all my joints. I'm told that all of this results from the spirochetes' dying off. I believe this is true. The infusions are Asian hordes sweeping across the wide plains, overwhelming our enemy. I lay in bed, sick with fever, feebly triumphant.

Now the fever has stopped, and I'm better but not well. I know I am ill. I feel as if I were walking carefully on some unreliable surface, not knowing what movement might cause a sudden terrifying crack and plunge. Yesterday I took the dogs out for a walk through the woods, down to the winter-dark pond and past it, up the hillside beyond. The woods are brown and mysterious now; the trees creak ponderously in the wind, and their gray filigree tops sway

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silently. The narrow path was soft underfoot. Walking along it, climbing the steep slope of the hill, I suddenly felt the delicate, tangling grope of the snake inside my chest, a dry, grappling sensation just above my heart. When it happened, my heart began to pound, panicky, shrinking from this alien presence. I had nowhere to go for help. I was the one who gave permission for this. My brain believes it's good; my body fears it. I stood still, on the soft path. I tried to calm my heart. Above me the tops of the trees moved slowly, swaying against the gray sky.

On a Saturday my husband, Mark, comes into the kitchen when I'm getting ready to infuse. He's been out in the village doing errands, and now he stands just inside the door, setting down packages. I know he sees my equipment on the kitchen counter, but he keeps his eyes away from it, as though it were a naked body.

"I couldn't find the coffee you like," he says, unzipping his parka. His voice seems loud and artificial.

"That's all right," I say. "They have it at Sgaglio's. I'll get it tomorrow."

"I got everything else," he says. His eyes now fix on mine, faintly accusing, as though I've contaminated the kitchen.

"Thanks," I say, conciliatory.

He ducks back out into the mudroom, to hang up his coat. When he comes back in, he shuts the heavy kitchen door hard.

"You're welcome," he says. Still without looking at my syringes, his dark gaze fixed on mine until it shifts to the door, he heads for his study. Mark is a philosophy professor, and his mind moves either in great wheeling arcs or in little tiny circles, depending on your point of view. I hear him sit down in his study. Alone in the kitchen, I turn back to my instruments, but now the sight of them fills me with dread. They look diabolical, like something from a horror movie.

When they are ready, I tell myself that Mark was just uncomfortable, not horrified. Or he was abstracted, as he often is. I call in to him in his study, my voice playful. "I'm about to shoot up. Want to watch?" If he'll be part of this, it will be less frightening; it will seem more normal. But he doesn't want to watch.

"No thanks," he calls from his study. His voice is not playful, and after a moment I hear his door close quietly. I know he finds all this repugnant—and why shouldn't he? Why should he have to share it with me?

He's not the only one. My friend Sarah came over one morning, and when she saw my syringes in their bags on the counter, she jumped nervously behind me. "I don't want to look at them," she explained.

I begin to wonder if I should wear a bell, to warn normal people of my approach. I feel frightened and isolated. I can see I am alone here.

Last night, in bed, when Mark was ready to go to sleep, he closed his Kierkegaard and set it on his bedside table next to the clock. "That's it for me," he said. He took off his glasses and rubbed fiercely at the bridge of his nose, which glistened. He folded his glasses, set them on top of his book, and turned off the light. When he rolled over on his side, toward me, I was waiting for him.

"Put your arms around me," I said, and my husband did this at once, gathering me wholly against him. My face pressed close to his chest. Surrounded by his comfort, I said, "Tell me I'm going to get well." I needed to hear the words.

I felt Mark's hand on the back of my head, stroking my hair. "You're going to get well," he said.

"Say it again," I said, pressing my face against his chest.

Tonight I'm alone. Mark is away at a conference, but a visiting nurse, Ginger, is coming. It's her second visit. She came early on to change the bandages around the tube after it was first put in. Now she's going to change the tube. I'm uneasy about this, because I don't know what it means. Will she pull out the whole long snake that has burrowed its way so deep inside me? Drag it out from its secret nest above my heart? I'm frightened to have it in there, but I'm also frightened to have it moved.

Still, I'm looking forward to seeing Ginger. I know I've done well, and I'm proud of myself. I'm looking forward to her praise: I'm a good patient. The pains are mostly gone, and both their arrival and their departure are proof of my prowess. The opening where the line enters my skin is pale and healthy, not inflamed. Each morning I have performed the infusion successfully, sending the golden tide deep into my interior. Each day, screwing the tiny threads into the Clave, unlocking the entrance to my veins, plugging myself into the heavy golden globe, I feel the Rocephin rush silently into my bloodstream and I feel charged with victory. I feel the spirochetes failing against this magnificent onslaught, overwhelmed, undone. I know we'll be victorious, and my nurse knows it too. She is the agent of my healing. Her presence plays a part. It will make this real. She'll infuse me with hope and conviction.

Around eight o'clock Ginger arrives. She opens the back door and bustles cheerfully into the kitchen. "Hi there," she says, boisterous and good-natured. The dogs sniff her, wagging their tails. "Good *dog*," she says in a croon, leaning unctuously over them and patting their heads too hard, "good *dog*." Ginger is in her early thirties and thickset, with bushy brown hair in a wild, shoulder-length aura. She's wearing a knitted wool dress, a heavy sweater, and dark, clunky shoes. She's powerful and clumsy, like a shaggy little bull.

Ginger sets down her bag and takes off her padded jacket, already talking. "I just came from an auction in Poughkeepsie," she says. "It was fun."

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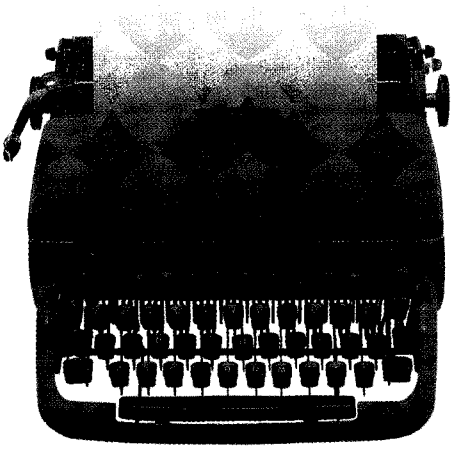

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"Great," I say. "Did you get anything?"

"A rocker," she says emphatically, delighted I've asked. "A porch rocker. It's real old and funky. I really love it."

"Great," I say again.

I don't care what she bought, but I'm so pleased to see her that she could read aloud from the telephone book. I listen happily as she gabs, watching her take out a big plastic packet, sealed and sterile, full of small, intricate objects in their own antiseptic packets. She spreads them on the kitchen table, and I sit down. Outside, the darkness is thickening, and we lean together under the hanging lamp. I lay my arm on the table and roll up my sleeve. Ginger takes off her sweater and tosses back her heavy mass of hair. She is large at that table, breathy, fleshy, bulky. I wish her hair were in a bun. I wish she were lean and smooth, clipped and austere, in a white uniform.

"So, how have you been?" she asks.

"Fine," I say with pride. "Some aches and pains in my joints, but that doesn't bother me."

Ginger nods. "My patients who have this love feeling achy," she says, as though this is an endearingly foolish trait. "They think it means they're getting better."

I smile with her; I know they're right.

Ginger opens her sterile packets, ripping back adhesive strips, putting on thin gloves. I am nervous about this procedure, the hidden snake, fearful of what she is about to do. She yanks off the bandage holding the plastic shunt flat against my arm, to where it enters my skin. As her hands near the opening, I turn rigid. She stops. "Where does it hurt?" she asks.

"It doesn't," I say. "I'm just wary." In fact I am terrified.

"You think I'm going to pull the adhesive back against the tube," she says indulgently. "We're taught as rookies always to pull with the tube. You pull against it"—she makes a sudden ripping gesture, as though she is about to jerk the unprotected tube from where it snakes into my skin—"and you'd pull the shunt right out of your arm. Like, that is *not* therapeutic."

I say nothing, trying to calm my heartbeat. My whole system is running on alarm. My heart is pounding. That dangerous gesture, the mimicking of violence, has shocked me. She now begins to do delicate things to the tube. I don't want to watch, and to distract myself I look at her face.

"Do you do this a lot?" I ask.

She told me last time how grateful her patients are, and I want to hear stories of her successes. I want to hear how this disease is vanquished, how good she is at her work, how powerful and inexorable this treatment is. I am greedy for these stories. I want to count myself among this healing crowd.

Ginger looks up. "Oh, yes," she says. "I do chemotherapy all day long."

I frown; this isn't a word I want to hear. This is not a group I want to belong to. "No," I say. "I mean do you do this—treatment for my disease—often?"

"Oh, yes," Ginger says again. She bends over the tube. Her heavy hair falls over her shoulder, hanging in a thicket above the instruments. "In fact I have one patient who lives right near you. He's been on intravenous treatment for two years."

"Two years?" I say. I've been told mine will last six weeks.

"Yes," she says, shaking her head. "He's in terrible shape. He's had your disease for years, and it wasn't treated right away. He's nearly paralyzed. He's trying oxygen-chamber treatments now. Nothing really seems to help him."

I don't speak. I wish she weren't bending so close to my arm, which now lies bare and vulnerable beneath her fleshy face. The transparent tube curves down beneath my skin and disappears. The whole region of my arm twitches with alarm, with the extremity of its exposure. If she just jostles the tube accidentally now, the possibilities of pain will be horrifying. I cannot permit myself to think of the possibilities: infection, the lethal transmission of things directly to my heart, my poor vulnerable heart, its chambers directly under the snake's dangling toxic head. I feel that everything is dangerous now, that our passage together through this process has become perilous. Each step is crucial.

Ginger shakes her head again. "This is really a terrible disease," she says.

I cannot bear to hear what she is saying. I say rudely, "Don't you have any better stories?" My arm, in her hands, feels bare and frightened.

She looks up. "About this disease? No. If it isn't treated right away, it's really terrible. You see, it mutates in your system." I stare at her, appalled, willing her to stop telling me these things. She looks earnestly at me, her huge, bristling hair surrounding her face. "What happens is that the spirochetes, if they aren't treated right away, change form, so that the treatment can never catch up with the disease. Each time the doctor tries something new, the form is different. The disease goes deeper and deeper into your system. This man has it in his spinal cord, and it's gone into his brain; he has neurological symptoms. Now he's going to doctors who have it themselves, to see how they're treating their own diseases."

I stare down at my arm, mesmerized with horror. As she talks, against my will I am picturing the spirochetes in my own system, spiraling deeper and deeper, burrowing their way into my spinal fluid, sliding unstoppably into the crevices of my brain. Each word she speaks makes this real, inevitable, incontrovertible.

All my feelings of triumph, of power, of victory, are ebbing, cascading toward ruin. She is destroying everything I have accomplished. I hate the words she is saying. I hate

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what she is doing to me. I want to rip the tubing out of my arm. I want to tear out everything she has touched and throw it aside and order her from my house. She is casting a spell. She is cursing my body. She is destroying the health and vigor of my flesh. She is shattering my hope. She is declaring the futility of everything I am struggling to achieve. She is showing me a future of misery and despair. She is deriding my belief in the golden tide. I hate her more than I could have imagined possible.

Looking down at my arm, I say in a strained voice, "I don't think you should talk this way to your patients."

Alarmed, she looks up. "What does your doctor tell you?"

"He doesn't talk to me like this," I say, my voice choking. "And you should never talk like this to a patient."

"I'm sorry," Ginger says. She is clearly unsettled. "I'm a very sensitive person. I wouldn't have upset you if I had known."

"I've had this disease for ten years, and it hasn't been treated," I say. I am struggling. I am desperate to keep from crying. "I don't want to hear about this."

Shaken, Ginger bends over the tubing again. She is not changing the long snake, I discover. She is replacing only the outer section of it, the part that goes from the Clave to the junction, but I now hate having her touch me. She is contaminating me; her touch is dangerous, poison to my body. Her touch is lethal to me. I imagine ripping everything out of my arm, flinging the transparent coils away from me onto the floor.

She works for a few seconds in silence, and then starts up again. "Last time I came," she says carefully, "we talked about your daughter, remember? Who has this too, right? And was treated for it?"

How can she not have understood me? Does she imagine I want to hear this about my daughter? "*I said I don't want to talk about this*," I say.

I am now swollen, huge with wrath and despair and grief. I am outraged that she would choose to use her power over me in this way, that she would come to me disguised as a healer, and reveal herself instead as a black demon, an agent of doom and anguish. I want her to get out of my kitchen, out of my house, off my property. I want to sic the dogs on her. I sit in raging silence while she finishes. She pads heavily back and forth, cleaning up, throwing things away. Her head is down, her face averted. I think she's crying. I don't care.

I want only to control my tears, to keep from breaking down in her presence, to achieve merely that. And in that one small thing I am victorious. A

Roxana Robinson is the author of Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life *(1999) and four works of fiction, including* This Is My Daughter *(1998). Her forthcoming novel,* Sweetwater, *will be published next spring.*

Edward Sorel lives in Manhattan. He and his wife, Nancy Caldwell Sorel, created the First Encounters series, which ran in The Atlantic *for twelve years and was published as a collection in 1994.*

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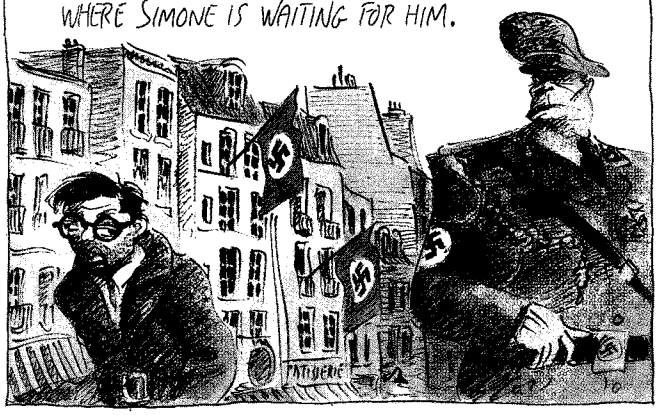
1932

HE GETS A JOB TEACHING IN LE HAVRE, SHE GETS ONE IN MARSEILLES. IN THE NAME OF "OPENNESS" (HIS CREDO IS TRAVEL, POLYGAMY, TRANSPARENCY) HE FEELS OBLIGED TO WRITE HER LONG, DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF HIS SEXUAL CONQUESTS.

1940

TAKEN PRISONER BY THE ADVANCING GERMANS, PRIVATE SARTRE IS SENT TO A STALAG. BUT SOON CREATES FAKE PAPERS THAT CLASSIFY HIM AS "PARTIALLY BLIND." HE IS RELEASED. HE HEADS FOR PARIS, NOW OCCUPIED BY THE GERMANS, WHERE SIMONE IS WAITING FOR HIM.



1942

HAVING AT LEAST TRIED TO LIBERATE FRANCE, HE NOW FEELS FREE TO WRITE FOR A COLLABORATIONIST WEEKLY. LATER BEING AND NOTHINGNESS IS PUBLISHED, AND IN 1944 HE STAGES NO EXIT, A HUGE SUCCESS. ITS MESSAGE — "HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE" — IS, OF COURSE, APPROVED BY NAZI CENSORS.

1945

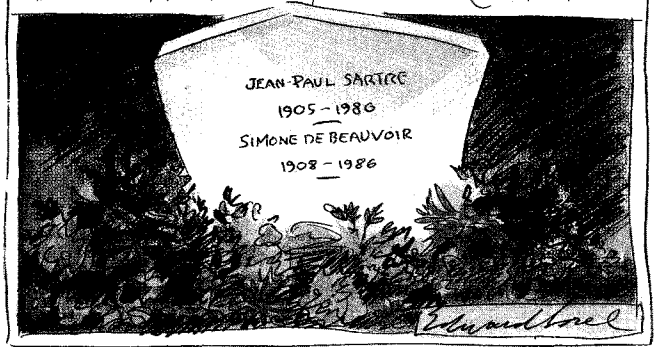
SARTRE HAS HAD A GOOD WAR. HE IS FAMOUS, RICH, AND SURROUNDED BY WOMEN ATTRACTED BY HIS INTELLECTUAL GLAMOUR. SIMONE TACITLY ACCEPTS HER ROLE AS SEXUALLY RETIRED MISTRESS AND EVEN INTRODUCES SOME OF HER ATTRACTIVE STUDENTS TO HIM TO ADD TO HIS SERAGLIO.

1965

AS SARTRE GROWS OLDER, HIS GIRLS BECOME YOUNGER. THE EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD ARLETTE ELKAIM BEGS FOR HELP WITH HER PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION, AND BECOMES A PARTICULAR FAVORITE. WITHOUT INFORMING SIMONE, SARTRE SECRETLY ADOPTS ARLETTE.

1980

SARTRE DIES, AND 50,000 FOLLOW HIS COFFIN THROUGH THE STREETS OF PARIS. HE LEAVES HIS ESTATE, INCLUDING LITERARY PROPERTY, TO ARLETTE. BEAUVOIR CONSOLES HERSELF WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS SHE WHO WILL ONE DAY BE BURIED NEXT TO HIM AT MONTPARNASSE CEMETERY.



LITERARY LIVES *by Edward Sorel*

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PURSUITS & RETREATS

TRAVEL

THE ROMANCE OF BIG SUR

A visit to a rugged and beautiful California haven that is all the more lovable for its idiosyncrasies

BY BARBARA WALLRAFF

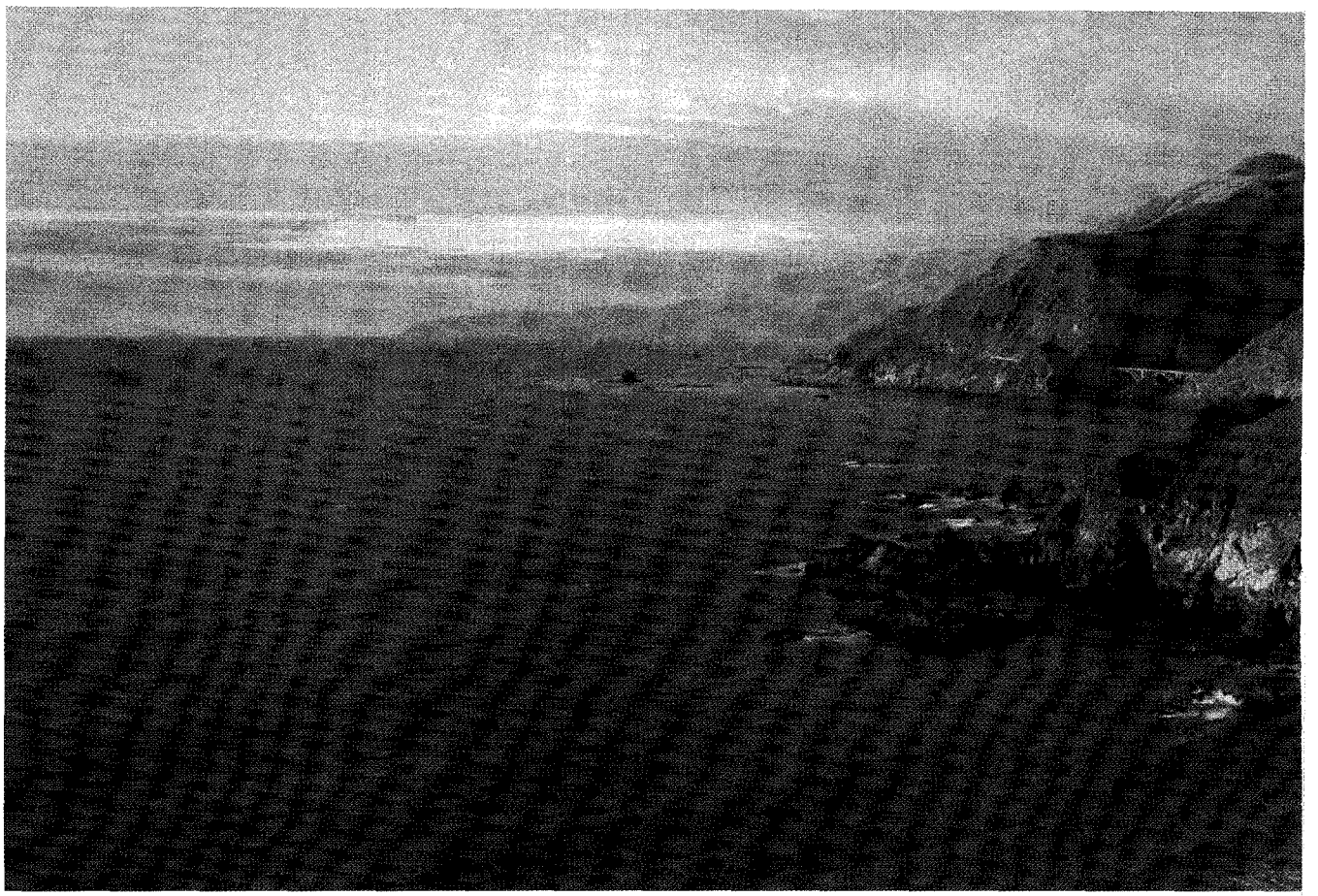
.....

A calligraphic sign requested that we not walk on the roof of our—I don't know what to call it, other than "accommodations." (The official name of it is an Ocean House, at the Post Ranch Inn, in Big Sur, California.) The fellow helping my husband, Julian, and me with our luggage dryly remarked that the local deer never do pay any attention to that directive. No wonder: the roof is covered with bountifully planted sod. That afternoon, this past spring, when we entered our home for a week, we started at roof level and walked down a flight of steps cut into the earth, flanked by cascades of rose, bottlebrush, and rosemary bushes. They smelled heavenly, and they buzzed, with bees and hummingbirds.

Come inside and—boom!—there's the view: a scrap of the cliff into whose side the building has been dug, the ocean below, and the sky at eye level and above. You can see the view from the bedroom or from the stone soaking tub, which is separated from the bedroom by a double-sided fireplace. We had a small terrace, from which all that could be seen was more of the lush plantings to the south, the land falling away at our feet and sweeping off into the distance to the north, and the sky and the broad Pacific before us.

Usually all that could be heard was the bees and hummingbirds and, when we wanted, the music emanating from our choice of twenty-one diverse commercial-free channels on the stereo system. Not that we listen to much New Age music at home, but it definitely matched the mood here. We kicked off

RIC ENBRIGHT/CORBIS



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our shoes, opened one of the complimentary half bottles of wine in the room, picked cheese and Lavasch crackers from among the complimentary snacks arrayed for our pleasure (I wish more high-end hotels would catch on that including up front in the room rate whatever food and drink they put in the minibar makes guests feel pampered, whereas leaving lots of goodies around with fat price tags on them makes guests feel ripped off), and went out to sit in the sun.

Big Sur is fabulously romantic, and no place in it is more so than the Post Ranch Inn. Early one evening we were heading over to the terrace of the inn's restaurant, Sierra Mar, to have a drink and watch the sunset when we saw a group of people leaving one of the other rooms. Among them were a man in an odd double-breasted suit, like what a naval officer in a Gilbert and Sullivan production might wear, and a startled-looking woman in a frilly blue dress, holding a bouquet. I dawdled until another, more matter-of-factly dressed woman who'd come out of the room caught up with me. "What's going on?" I asked. The couple had just been married, she told me, and she'd officiated. The strange thing was, she went on, that the bride hadn't known in advance that her boyfriend had been planning a wedding.

Ah, Big Sur. Roughly three hours by car south of the San Francisco airport, it is lovable for its surprises and idiosyncrasies, for being neither so normative nor so easy and obliging as more southerly parts of California tend to be. Big Sur's inhabitants and devotees are famously individualistic, or possibly even peculiar. Maybe they have to be to remain loyal to Big Sur, with its rugged terrain, its treacherous sea, and its challenging climate, full of rainstorms and fogs and droughts and gales. The first time we visited, several years ago, a cold rain fell the whole time. On our recent visit people told us proudly about how they had coped after mudslides closed Route 1 both to the north and to the south for *three months* in 1998. And during another mudslide season, some years before, everyone ordered groceries by phone, and once a week the National Guard delivered them by helicopter. A group of residents split the cost of a weekly case of champagne, so that they could toast the helicopter immediately upon its arrival.

The person who mentioned the champagne to me was Mickey Muennig, the architect of the Post Ranch Inn. Once a year since the inn opened, ten years ago, Muennig has been leading inn guests on a tour of a sampling of his local buildings. We timed our visit for the tour, out of admiration for Muennig, who is a leading practitioner of organic, or green, architecture, which matches the mood of Big Sur as neatly as New Age music does. People in the area call each of his buildings "a Mickey Muennig," and everyone knows which ones they are. Mickey Muennigs tend to have swooping curves, often in wood, and notably few right angles. They make use of a lot of concrete, as well as wood and stone and glass.

The morning's highlight was a house at the end of a steep, winding

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road down from Route 1. Just inside the front door was a curved wall made of undisguised concrete blocks stacked intentionally not quite on top of one another. Facing the sea was, predictably, a wall of glass, with a redwood deck outside. From there a walkway of steel slats, with railings made of nothing but inward-angled sheets of glass (so as not to interfere with the view), led to a more spacious deck atop a round guesthouse. Whitewater crashed on the rocks below. A hole in the floor of a balcony off a bedroom in the main house allowed a madrone tree to grow up through. The couple for whom Muennig designed the house told me that they'd originally intended this to be a vacation home but they loved it so much they now lived here most of the time.

The terrain of Big Sur does make for astounding vistas—except when you're fogged in. But the fog tends to hug the coast; often you can just head inland a ways to find a clear, sunny, warm ridgetop. National forests and state parks safeguard millions of acres in the area, which are laced with hundreds of miles of hiking trails. On many trails, on many days, you're likely to see fewer human beings than members of other species, including deer, wild turkeys, bald eagles, and, occasionally, California condors and mountain lions. Otters, seals, and sea lions live along the coast. A little farther out runs what the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce refers to as a "superhighway" for migrating whales.

Just north of Big Sur cattle graze on broad meadows overlooking the sea. Nonprofit groups spearheaded by the Big Sur Land Trust have struck deals with the owners of many hundreds of thousands of acres, so that these will never be developed. Regulations have for decades prevented the building of new houses that can be so much as glimpsed from any main road. A strong consensus favors the idea that Big Sur should look no more built up a generation or a century from now than it does today.

In today's Big Sur the elements of civilization are too dispersed for the word "town" to apply. If you want civilization in a concentrated form, you must go either north, to Carmel, or south, to San Simeon, with its Hearst Castle. A visit to each of these places makes a nice outing. On the day we went up to Carmel, we followed some advice that a knowledgeable resident had tendered, and returned by way of the Old Coast Road. The turnoff for it on Route 1, the man had told us, is just north of the handsome Depression-era Bixby Creek Bridge. "Coast" road is a total misnomer, we soon began to realize.

At first the drive, which is unpaved, ascends gently, making its way inland—where it stays until it rejoins Route 1 near Andrew Molera State Park, back in Big Sur. As we put distance between ourselves and the Pacific, scattering yellow dust behind us, I wondered why this had struck someone as worth recommending. But soon we could look down and back on a panorama of sea and sky and a formerly hidden crook of valley. Then we crossed the ridgeline and began a descent, and not long after that we were winding through a cool, ancient forest of redwoods, the only sign of habitation being an occasional cottage or trailer. Eventually we climbed the ridge again and emerged from the forest amid vast grassy hillsides. From up there we could now and then catch glimmers of the sea.

Another aspect of Big Sur that people make much of is its social history, involving Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac and Edward Weston and Ansel Adams and the heyday of the Esalen Institute. The ethos of all this wafts over the area like a second, more ethereal fog. Esalen is still there, offering workshops. The home of a longtime friend of Henry Miller's has become the Henry Miller Library, right on Route 1.

Those who want to steep themselves in the history and the lore may enjoy a stay at Deetjen's Big Sur Inn, just down the way from the Henry Miller Library. Helmuth Deetjen seems to have been a fugitive from justice in Norway. In the 1930s he and his wife, Helen, bought a plot of land in Big Sur, and Helmuth, with the help of local prison labor (turn and turn about), built the inn's rooms and cabins by hand. Ultimately Helen oversaw its restaurant, and through the years many colorful characters paid court to the couple. Helen Deetjen died in 1962, and when Helmuth followed her, a decade later, he in effect bequeathed the inn to its future guests. Now a nonprofit foundation operates the inn and restaurant.

Julian and I had dinner there one night and were charmed; it is as if preserved in amber. The dining rooms (and also the rest of the inn, a bit of snooping suggested) are decorated willy-nilly with old photos, old dishes, knickknacks, doodads, and whatnots. I asked our young waitress to please explain the pseudo-Egyptian gilded animal-head sculpture looming over our table from a wall mounting. It was actually a light fixture, she said, that we were supposed to be able to turn on by touching its nose, but the mechanism was broken. The thing had a companion in the second dining room, and she went over to it and touched its nose, but it, too, was broken.

What I've managed over the years to take away from the writings of Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac amounts to an argument in favor of experiencing one's senses fully and living in the moment. That sounded good to me on this trip—and so I gave the history of Big Sur short shrift, skipped the Henry Miller Library, and booked a massage in my room. (Each room at the Post Ranch contains a massage table, folded up and tucked away somewhere, though there's also a spa with facilities for massages and other, more esoteric treatments.)

Thomas, the gray-ponytailed masseur, was wonderfully relaxing. Not only was his touch soothing, but so was every one of the few words he said to me. Thomas worked barefoot, and at one point when I was lying on my stomach, I opened my eyes to peek through the opening in the "face cradle" and saw that he had gold rings on four of his toes. When he had finished and invited me to sit up, he handed me a bottle of spring water that he'd fetched from my refrigerator and told me, soothingly, to be sure to hydrate, to flush out of my system the toxins he'd dislodged.

One day Julian and I went up to Point Lobos State Park, smelled the salt air, got as close to the ocean as was allowed, and admired a colony of barking

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Why We Need A Smaller U.S. Population
And How We Can Achieve It

We need a smaller population in order to halt the destruction of our environment, and to create an economy that will be **sustainable** over the very long term.

We are trying to address our steadily worsening environmental problems without coming to grips with their root cause – overpopulation.

If present immigration and fertility rates continue, our population, now over 288 million, will pass 400 million by the year 2050 – and still be growing rapidly!

All efforts to save our environment will ultimately be futile unless we not only halt U.S. population growth, but reverse it, so that our population can eventually be stabilized at a **sustainable** level – far lower than it is today.

The Optimum U.S. Population Size

The central issue is surely this: **At what size should we seek to stabilize U.S. population?** Unless we know in what direction we should be headed, how can we possibly devise sensible policies to get us there?

The size at which our population is eventually stabilized is supremely important because of the effect of sheer numbers of people on such vitally important national goals as a healthy environment, and a sustainable economy.

We believe these goals can best be achieved with a U.S. population in the range of 125 to 150 million, or about its size in the 1940s. This optimum size could be reached in about three to four generations if we do two things now that are well within our grasp.

How To Get There

1. **Halt illegal immigration and reduce annual legal immigration to not over 100,000.** Then, immigration will no longer contribute significantly to our population growth, as it does now.

2. **Lower our fertility rate** (the average number of children per woman) from the present 2.1 to around 1.5 and maintain it at that level for several decades. We believe that non-coercive financial incentives will be necessary in order to reach that goal.

If almost all women had no more than two children, our fertility rate would drop to around 1.5, because many women remain childless by choice, or choose to have not more than one child. **We promote the ideal of the two-child maximum family as the social norm, because that is the key to lowering our fertility.**

Incentives to Lower Fertility

NPG proposes these incentives to motivate parents to have no more than two children:

- Eliminate the present Federal income tax exemption for dependent children born after a specified date.
- Give a Federal income tax credit **only** to those parents who have not more than two children. Those with three or more would lose the credit entirely.
- Give an annual cash grant to low income parents who pay little or no income tax, and who have no more than two children Those with three or more children would lose the cash grant entirely.

Two Vastly Different Paths Lie Before Us

With the reductions in immigration and fertility we advocate, our nation could start **now** on the path toward a sustainable, and prosperous, population of 125 to 150 million.

Without such a program, we are almost certain to continue our mindless, headlong rush down our current path. That path is leading us straight toward catastrophic population levels that can only devastate our environment, and produce universal poverty in a crowded, polluted nation.

If you agree that we need to work toward a smaller U.S. population, we need your support. **NPG is the only organization that calls for a smaller U.S. and world population, and for specific, realistic measures to achieve those goals.**

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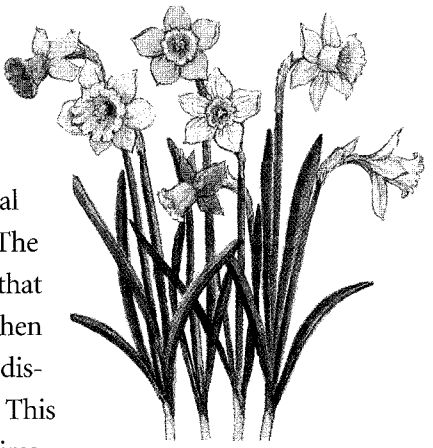

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...goes on into September

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sea lions congregated on rocks offshore. Another day we followed an almost mile-long trail through woods on the inn's property—the scenic route to the inn's main swimming pool. And several times we visited a tiny, almost-hot-tub-temperature pool perched on the cliff, overlooking the view, near Sierra Mar.

Another day we wandered across Route 1 to Ventana, the other deluxe inn in Big Sur that has an avid following. Alas, its dining room, Cielo, was closed for renovations, so we were unable to try it out. A couple of humbler restaurants in Big Sur, however, were nice surprises. The handmade sign that reads WOOD-FIRED GRILL AND PIZZA outside the Big Sur Bakery and Restaurant does not do justice to a place that serves tender rare duck breast and fresh salmon cooked just so. As we left, the chef offered us the chance to load up, free, on what would soon be day-old goods from the bakery: savory bread with pepper in the dough, and cookies and breakfast buns. On the night before our last in Big Sur we couldn't decide where to eat, so we asked for advice from members of the inn's staff. The Roadhouse, they said, had no view at all, but its food was really good. And so it was—bold and imaginative contemporary Mexican cuisine.

On our last night we strolled over to Sierra Mar for dinner. A calligraphic sign near the entrance requests that patrons not use cell phones inside. So when, an hour or two after we'd been seated, the unmistakable sound of a young woman burbling on her phone was heard, hands discreetly went up all over the room, summoning the waiters to ask them to deal with it. Our waiter came over, murmuring expressionlessly to us and his other tables nearby, "They just got engaged."

The Big Sur Chamber of Commerce Web site, www.bigsurcalifornia.org, is a good source of information about the area. Descriptions of dozens of hiking trails and reports on their condition can be found on the Web site for the nonprofit Ventana Wilderness Alliance, www.ventanawild.org. For more information about the Post Ranch Inn, visit its Web site, www.postranchinn.com, or call 800-527-2200. For Deetjen's visit www.deetjens.com or call 831-667-2377, and for Ventana visit www.ventanainn.com or call 800-628-6500.

Barbara Wallraff is a senior editor of The Atlantic *and the author of* Word Court *(2000).*

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FOOD

MAINE CERTIFIED

The potatoes of September

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

In fifteen years or so of farm forays I have watched potatoes come and go in the gourmet revival of heirloom everything. Novelty candy stripes and blue or purple potatoes appear one season and vanish the next, as growers learn which kinds best suit their soil and cooks realize that color seldom indicates better flavor. Chefs discover that the secret of the best puree they ever tasted was not the Ratte variety that Parisian chefs swear by but the equal weight of butter whipped in before serving. In my experiments dark-horse varieties have often turned out to taste far better than touted ones. As always, variety counts less than climate and the care the farmer takes.

I was always puzzled, though, as to why so little potato news came from Maine, which for even longer than Idaho has been synonymous with potatoes in this country. It is also part of my heritage: my grandfather traveled every fall from Connecticut to northern Maine, where he bought the state's famous seed potatoes to sell to southern New England farmers. I learned on a recent visit to Aroostook County, one of my grandfather's destinations, that Maine has kept its reputation among the country's most reliable suppliers of disease-resistant seed potatoes even as the state's potato industry has otherwise diminished.

Few small farmers have stepped in to claim Maine's unused potato fields and grow the old varieties for which chefs and home cooks pay a premium. But on my trip I did find what might be the country's best source of those heirloom potatoes worth growing and eating: a strictly organic farm in the heart of what was once traditional potato-growing territory. It is run by an earthy, sympathetic couple whose entrepreneurial spirit and canny respect for the land my grandfather would have appreciated—even if their founding philosophy, and their hairstyles, would have baffled him.

When I drove into Wood Prairie Farm, a few miles from the several potato cooperatives remaining along a stretch of Route 1 in northern Aroostook County, Jim Gerritsen was leaning over a curious tractor painted pea green. He had rigged its trailer as a potato planter, with a few homemade parts jutting from the base and sides. "Two eyes apiece," he said, cutting a long seed potato into four chunks. "It's the eyes that sprout." He laid the chunks, some of which had already sprouted, on a black rubber conveyor belt at the back of the planter. "We put this on," he said, pointing to a spade-shaped length of metal at the front, "because our soil is so rocky it could break an ordinary potato planter."

Aroostook hardly resembles the Maine that draws tourists from all over the world, the Maine of lobster boats and evergreen-dotted seascapes. The county is vast, as big as Connecticut and Rhode Island combined; it has sky-wide open plains, and hills covered with pines. It's easy to see why some New Englanders have an almost visceral annual longing to go north, for the hunting, fishing, and fresh air. It's easy to see, too, why the farmland appealed to English and Irish settlers, who recognized that the cool, damp climate would be ideal for growing potatoes. They also discovered that the soil, however rocky, was better than what they had left behind; "caribou loam," as in the native reindeer that once lived in the Maine woods, has just the right mixture of clay, silt, and sand. Through the 1940s Maine was the country's largest potato producer, and Aroostook County produced 90 percent of Maine potatoes.

Today the Maine woods are being methodically logged by Canadian and American timber companies, and the chief planting in what once was the chief agricultural county in New England has become trees. The acreage devoted to potatoes shrank from 200,000 in the late 1940s to 64,000 in 2000, a loss of nearly 70 percent. The soil is still just as good for potatoes. But the big buyers don't want Maine potatoes anymore, because, like all potatoes grown without steady, controlled irrigation, they are

JACK MOLLOY

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uneven in shape. The widespread use of irrigation in the West—and, especially, the standards of uniformity that McDonald's set in the 1950s for its french fries—made the industry move.

Running a farm in Aroostook County was an unusual career choice for a young man who grew up in San Francisco. But farming ran in Gerritsen's blood: both his parents had been raised on farms and were part of the postwar migration from country to city. ("My grandfather kept telling my dad that farming was hard, that there wasn't much money in it," Gerritsen told me. "My dad listened.") While studying forestry at a California college, Gerritsen decided that his place was on a farm, not in school. From the look of him today, that decision was inevitable: his craggy features, deep-set green eyes, and wind-etched face immediately identify him as a man of the land. The gray-white beard and shoulder-length hair identify him as a child of the 1960s.

The decline of potato farming in Maine was what made Gerritsen think he could afford good farmland there, and get a head start on the organic farming he intended to practice. Land was cheap, and Aroostook County was too remote to attract developers. Farmland was still clear: former potato farmers had not yet planted it all with trees, a low-maintenance crop, and new-growth forests had not yet covered abandoned farmland. The lapsed time without any kind of planting meant that much Aroostook farmland would more than meet the requirements of organic farming. Gerritsen told me that he was also drawn by Maine's reputation for having "good, friendly, down-to-earth people living an outdoor tradition."

In 1976 Gerritsen bought Wood Prairie Farm, in Bridgewater, a short drive down Route 1 from the town of Presque Isle, the effective capital of Aroostook County, and only a few miles from the Canadian border. At first he grew what he thought the organic market wanted: vegetables, apples for cider, pumpkins. He also raised cattle and lambs for organic meat. But none of these paid well enough to support the farm.

Potatoes seemed the least likely solution. What market remains is mostly for

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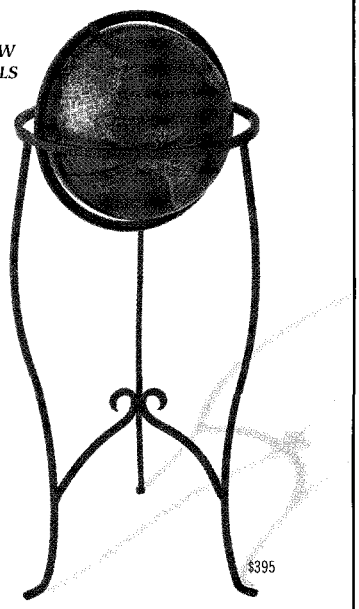

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"chipping" potatoes—unbeautiful potatoes not shapely enough for McDonald's but sufficient for industrial french fries. Then Gerritsen thought of seed potatoes. A significant portion of the Maine potato market has always been for seed potatoes, which are fully mature and have been grown carefully (and labor-intensively) to ensure that they are disease-free. Potatoes left over from the previous year's harvest are likely to be plagued by bacteria, viruses, or fungi; late blight, which caused the Irish potato famine, remained a danger to the U.S. crop through the 1980s. Starting in the 1920s, Maine set itself up as the country's most scrupulous producer of seed potatoes. "Maine certified" meant the best and safest potatoes when my grandfather was buying and selling them, and the phrase still carries great weight in the potato world. Gerritsen could fill a big gap by producing certified organic seed potatoes, and the most appealing varieties would be heirlooms and traditional Maine potatoes that had fallen out of use.

To find these, and for inspiration on reaching customers directly instead of losing profits to middlemen, Gerritsen listened carefully to Chris Holmes, a Maine farmer who through the late 1980s sold historical potato varieties by way of a "potato-of-the-month club." When I was first sampling heirloom potatoes, I spoke with Holmes, who thought he might be the only farmer growing them in Maine; on my recent trip I visited him in his apartment near Presque Isle, where, though sidelined by Parkinson's disease, he tries to convince farmers of the economic benefits of growing heirlooms. He didn't have the chance on his own farm, he told me, to see through the full potential of his idea, and he was somewhat discouraged that few farmers had taken his lead. He was proud, though, of Gerritsen, who has been his prize pupil, and told me how much he hopes that other farmers will copy Wood Prairie's success.

Gerritsen was helped greatly by his wife, Megan, a nearly local girl (although she grew up in New York State, she had worked on nearby farms and has family in Maine). Megan's hair, parted down the middle with a braid around her head, may be as hippie-ish as her husband's, but it would be less surprising to

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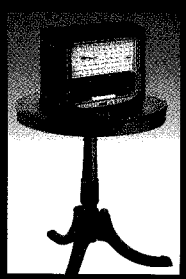

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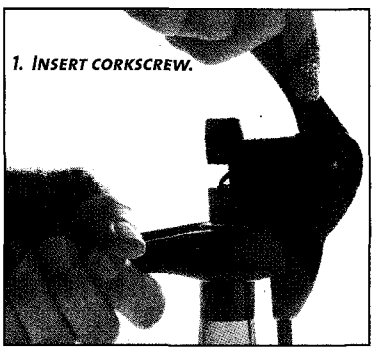

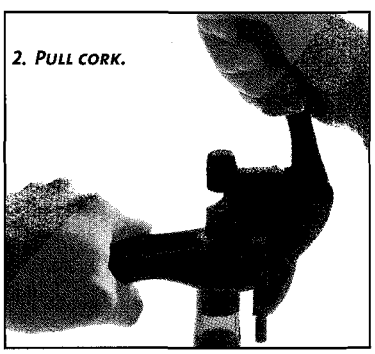

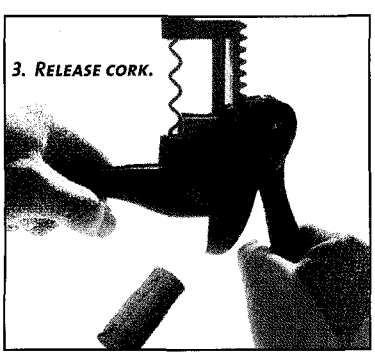

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my grandfather, whose own father moved to the small Connecticut town where I grew up in hopes of emulating the agricultural success and familial closeness of the plain-living, plain-dressing members of a colony of the Swiss Apostolic Church, which still flourishes there. The Gerritsens have three small children, who help try out potato recipes, and many cats and a few dogs to finish off leftovers; during my visit all of them, along with several of the neighbors who work at the farm, wandered in and out of the cozy, pine-paneled Wood Prairie office, which is above the temperature-controlled storage and packing cellar. Megan cooks new heirlooms as Jim plants and harvests them, and everyone offers an opinion.

The couple decided at the outset to go for inner beauty. Even the organic market, which is becoming increasingly industrialized, grows "faceless, nameless potatoes that yield well and look pretty but don't have very good flavor," Megan says. The Gerritsens came to the same conclusion as anyone does who tastes a lot of heirlooms: yellow-fleshed potatoes have a fuller, richer, more buttery flavor, but skin color and flesh color other than yellow mean little. Red or purple skins are usually just cosmetic. Blue or purple flesh, which usually turns an ugly gray when cooked, in my experience tastes like cardboard.

After a few years of planting and sampling more than a hundred kinds of potatoes, the Gerritsens narrowed to sixteen the varieties they would grow and ship directly to customers as both seed and table potatoes, including an all-blue and an all-red potato to satisfy the need for novelty. They also try new varieties every season. Their colorful catalogue—full of recipes, good information, and homespun but not hokey gardening tips, and of course printed on flecked recycled paper—has won them customers and friends all over the country. (Their Web site is www.woodprairie.com.) Among the customers the Gerritsens particularly enjoy talking with are gardeners who rely on Wood Prairie Farm's certified organic seed potatoes. Advising gardeners on techniques and varieties that might work best in their soil keeps the couple in touch with people from every region, and also gives them an early hint of spring in the long, long Maine winter.

The heirlooms most people try first, and the ones that brought potatoes new respect, are called fingerlings, for their long, thin shape. They often have superior flavor, and are prominent in the Wood Prairie catalogue: Russian Banana and Swedish Peanut, both of them among the best-tasting fingerlings and both yellow-fleshed; and the Gerritsens' favorite, Rose Finn Apple, a rare yellow-fleshed fingerling with pink skin.

But the potatoes I've lately come to appreciate are more like the kinds my grandfather might have speculated on during his annual trips north—homely, irregular round potatoes that fell out of favor when industry demanded uniform french-fry vehicles. The Gerritsens honor state tradition by growing round whites, the potatoes that brought Maine fame. Instead of Green Mountain and Irish Cobbler, the original commercial varieties, they have found newer round potatoes with better flavor, such as Onaway and one from Cornell University called Prince Hairy. They also grow a few round varieties with yellow flesh, and these were the ones that pleased me most when I sampled a generous selection from last year's crop: the familiar Yukon Gold, which along with Yellow Finns are the only widely available specialty potatoes with real flavor; the red-skinned Rose Gold; and Island Sunshine, a creamy-fleshed and exceptionally blight-resistant potato developed by two passionate Dutch-born organic breeders on nearby Prince Edward Island, another longtime potato-growing capital.

Island Sunshine's bright flavor and sunny color gave me the same sense of excited discovery I felt when, in the 1980s, I first tasted Ozette, still my favorite fingerling (and one the Gerritsens have occasionally sold). The hardy and disease-resistant Island Sunshine also makes a good starter potato for a neophyte gardener. Island Sunshine, Maine White Onaway, and Rose Finn Apple are moist-fleshed potatoes especially suited for mashing, meaning they are ideal for champ—a simple, satisfying dish I ate often on a recent trip to

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Ireland (see Palate at Large, following, for a recipe).

September is a month of intense activity at the farm, when all the varieties the Gerritsens planted in May are ready for harvesting, and Jim and his helpers use more of his home-rigged machines to dig them. An order of Wood Prairie potatoes arrives in handsome paper bags with a few holes punched in them for air. The back of each bag is illustrated with a drawing of the Gerritsen family, and the potatoes inside still have a dusting of dirt. They have been only brushed before packing; washing, the standard industry preparation, leaves potatoes vulnerable to age and rot. Stitched to each bag is a handsome postcard showing the potato variety, modeled after the colorful fruit-crate labels that served as art in early-twentieth-century America. These postcards are a reminder that an admirable, exigent tradition is being carried forward where it had nearly died out—and that potato eaters can benefit from it all year.

Corby Kummer, a senior editor of The Atlantic, *is the author of* The Pleasures of Slow Food, *to be published in November.*

PALATE AT LARGE

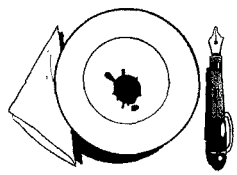
CHAMP

A one-dish supper of buttery mashed potatoes and greens

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

"The poorest man in Ireland knows what good potatoes and butter are," Peter Ward told me last spring at Country Choice, his café and market in Nenagh, midway between Dublin and Kerry in County Tipperary. "They're here for everybody." Ward, a big, friendly man who could have succeeded as a busker, speaks memorably about his mission to save and serve great farmhouse food—and, as an admiring friend told me before I visited, "he doesn't draw breath."



Country Choice is a "railroad car of a shop," as Ward says, behind an unassuming façade in a small town of extreme charm that somehow manages to skirt self-consciousness. The restaurant, which serves breakfast, lunch, and tea every day except Sunday, is a generous room up a few stairs at the back. There I learned about a potato dish with the appealing name of champ.

Nenagh was once the site of an important cattle market, and is still an important crossroads. ("It's hard to describe the Irish relationship with the cow," Ward says. "It's not unlike the Masai.") The town's dairy business remains strong: a large cooperative behind the shop produces butter for export to Europe. Farmhouse cheese has joined smoked salmon as Ireland's calling card in the world of gastronomy, and Ward ages the selections he brings home from his visits to cheese makers. The morning I visited, a Country Choice worker had gone to the bus stop to retrieve a round of Cashel blue, a mild but authoritative cow's-milk cheese. Jane and Louis Grubb, the Tipperary farmers who created Cashel blue, had entrusted the cheese to the bus driver, who knew both them and Ward. ("Food production in Ireland survives on friendship.")

Ward, who grew up on a farm in County Meath, opened his shop in 1982 after marrying Mary D'Arcy, who had grown up on a Nenagh farm. He began going to agricultural shows and calling on local farmers and cooks, and advertised in local papers saying that he would happily buy excess fruit, vegetables, and eggs. A welcome source was the kitchens and gardens of the Palladian villas around Lough Derg, a lake formed by the River Shannon that draws many tourists; two centuries ago the second sons of Anglo-Irish families with large inland estates built the houses, which are now largely the retreats of merchant princes. Peter began selling chutneys (a legacy of the Raj), from the great kitchens' annual production, and Mary began putting up jams and jellies

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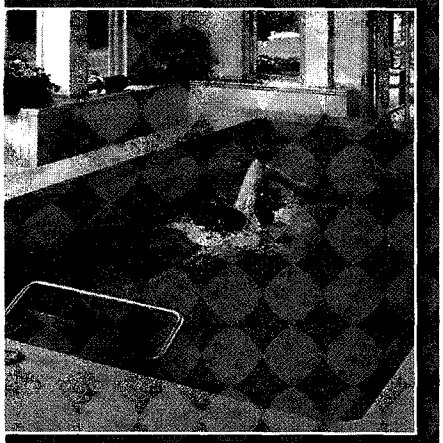

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with the "buckets and buckets" of damson plums, gooseberries, and other fruit gardeners brought by. Now she makes 15,000 jars a year.

The buckets of berries, and dripping crates of lettuce, and sacks of potatoes all arrive through the front door. Ward encourages what he calls the French practice of buying from the top of the counter and the supplies meant for the kitchen rather than from the glass case and the shelves. When I visited, customers were vying for the season's first fat asparagus. ("With our eggs and our butter they can make the mother *and* father of all Hollandaises.")

As we spoke, I was finishing a second helping of rhubarb crumble, made with rhubarb Ward had brought in that morning from his garden at the stone millhouse he shares with Mary, their three children, and five dogs. The crumble was a great example of its form (no oatmeal or nuts or trick ingredients in the crisp topping), but the real reason I had to have seconds was the cream on top—unwhipped and unclotted but still so thick you could faint from it. This was after a vegetable soup with a strong homemade chicken stock as its base and carrots, leeks, onions, and potatoes from local farms (I had a second helping of soup, too).

The bacon that makes its way into many dishes, the small tongues to be boiled and sliced for sandwiches, and the beautiful racks of beef I saw roasting in the glass-doored oven are also points of pride with Ward. Sophia O'Dowd, the confident young cook, said that only recently, two years after she began work, with two years of experience and a culinary-college degree to her credit, has Ward let her bake a ham. O'Dowd told me that the ingredients she could work with at Country Choice, and the freedom Ward allowed her (except with ham), were "Aladdin's keys for any chef."

Champ also goes by other charming names: stelk, cally, poundies, pandy, and, in Gaelic, *brúitín*. The principle is to simmer scallions or the greens from new onions in milk, beat the hot milk into just-mashed potatoes, and serve the potatoes mounded on hot plates with a well in the center for a lump of butter. Champ is nowadays served as a side dish, but it was traditionally an entire meal, frequently eaten on Fridays and fast days.

Here is a recipe—using tips from O'Dowd and a basic recipe from Myrtle Allen, whose Ballymaloe House restaurant and inn, in County Cork, launched several generations of cooks—to serve four as a main meal or six as a side dish. Allow a stick of butter to come to room temperature. Simmer two pounds of scrubbed, unpeeled, whole yellow-fleshed potatoes (see "Maine Certified," above, for suggested varieties) in salted water for thirty to forty minutes over medium heat; don't let the water boil. While the potatoes cook, simmer over low heat and in a separate pot one and a half cups of whole milk with a cup of fresh onion greens or scallions, chopped into rough half-inch lengths, until the greens are softened. Scallions are traditional, but you can use any greens you like; chopped fresh spinach leaves seem ideal to me, because I grew up in a house where mashed potatoes and spinach was a favorite Sunday supper. Frequent Irish variations include the same quantity of nettles or baby peas; a quarter cup of any fresh green herb, such as chives, parsley, or watercress, can be substituted. Strain out the greens when cooked, and reserve both the greens and the milk.

When the potatoes are tender all the way through (pierce them with a skewer or a knife), drain and, if you wish, peel them. Return the potatoes to the pot and dry them over medium heat for a minute or two, keeping them moving with a wooden spoon so that they don't stick. If the milk has cooled, heat it again just to a simmer. Mash the potatoes as you prefer: a ricer is the easiest and best way, and I also like old-fashioned wire-bottomed mashers (grid bottoms overwork the potatoes). As soon as the potatoes are free of lumps, add salt and pepper to taste and beat in a cup of the hot milk in a slow stream. Add more milk depending on how loose you like your potatoes, and stir in the greens until well blended. Spoon the potatoes onto hot plates and make a well in the middle of each serving. Pass the butter, so that each diner can cut a pat and watch it melt in the well. Don't skimp on the butter. It's part of the Irish glory.

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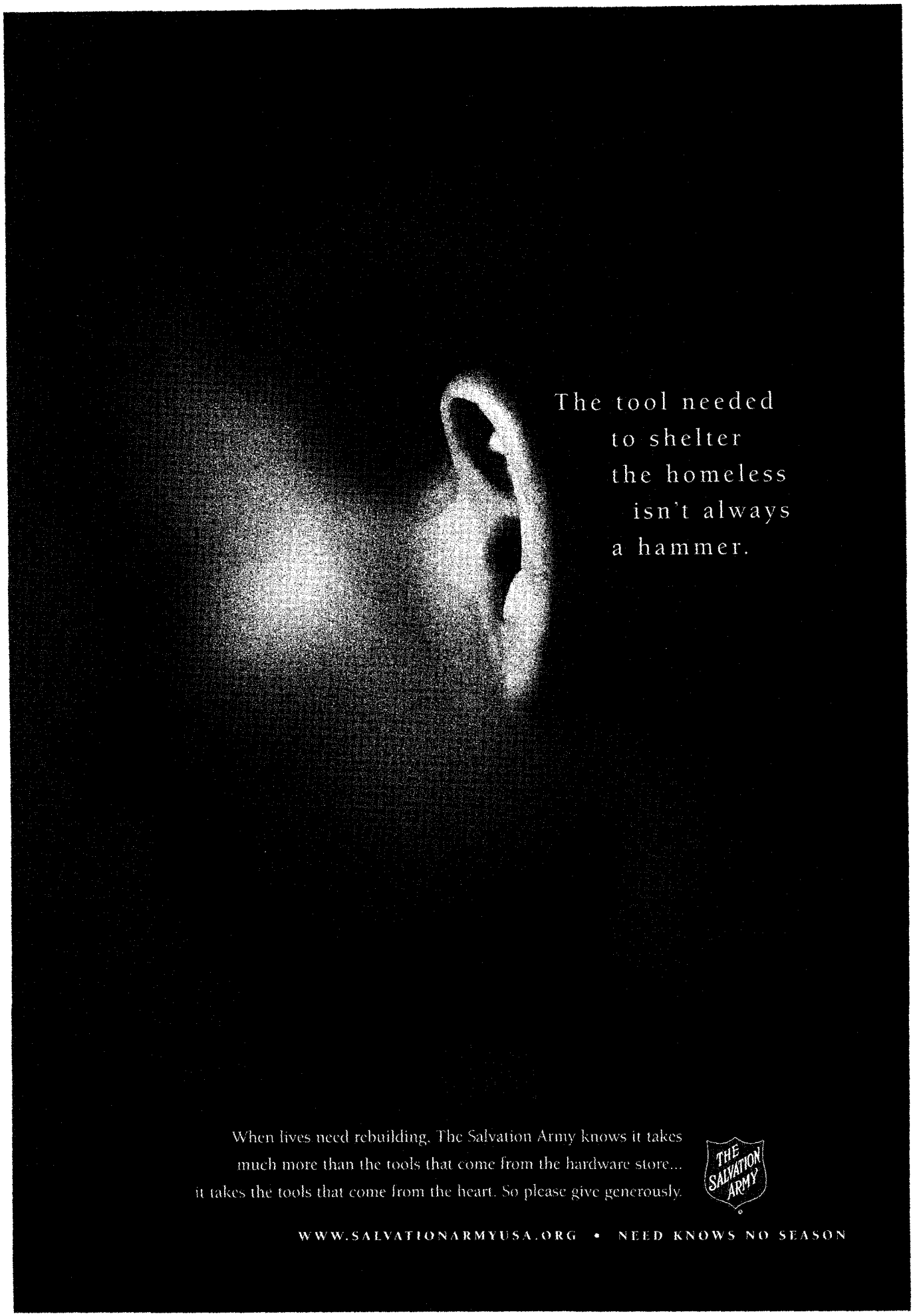

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ARCHITECTURE

THE BILBAO EFFECT

Public competitions for architectural commissions don't necessarily produce the best buildings

BY WITOLD RYBCZYNSKI

.....

In 1955 Le Corbusier built the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp, a remote site in the Jura Mountains near the Swiss border. The building had curved, roughly plastered concrete walls and a swelling roof that resembled a nun's wimple. These sculptural features challenged the functionalist dogma—to a large extent devised by the architect himself—of the white-shoebox International Style. After Ronchamp modern architecture was never quite the same.

Frank O. Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim is equally iconoclastic. With its ballooning shapes and titanium swirls, its colliding forms and unusual spaces, it has been described variously as a "postrationalist vision," an "inter-galactic spaceship," and a "titanium artichoke." There is a major difference, however, between the museum and the chapel. When I went to Ronchamp, in 1964, there were few other visitors. Most, judging by their cameras and sketchbooks, were architectural—not religious—pilgrims, students like myself. Corbu, as we called him, was one of the most important architects in the world. Yet his was hardly a household name; most Americans, pressed to identify a contemporary architect, would probably have named Frank Lloyd Wright, who had been dead for five years. People did go out of their way to visit buildings, but they were usually ancient works of art like Chartres Cathedral, or historical monuments like the Tower of London. Buildings by modern architects were objects of veneration for students, but they were not paid much attention by the public.

Today's public definitely knows about the Bilbao Guggenheim; since its opening, in 1997, it has attracted almost five million visitors. According to the *Financial Times*, in its first three years the museum has helped to generate about $500 million in economic activity and about $100 million in new taxes. On seeing the titanium artichoke, other cities have been saying, "We want one of those."

Seattle got off the mark early. In 1996, before the Bilbao Guggenheim was even complete, Paul Allen, a cofounder of Microsoft and a Jimi Hendrix fan, commissioned Gehry to design a rock-and-roll museum and performance venue in Seattle called the Experience Music Project. Gehry delivered a striking building whose bulbous shapes are variously covered in shimmering gold, silver, and purple stainless steel, and in red and blue aluminum shingles. These forms resemble the fragments of a giant, multicolored, broken guitar after a particularly violent rock concert.

Two years after the Bilbao Guggenheim opened, the Corcoran Gallery of Art announced that Gehry would build a large addition to its century-old building in Washington, D.C. The new design is a composition of sail-like metallic forms. Construction is slated to begin in late 2003, probably before the groundbreaking for Gehry's other major museum project: a forty-story-high Guggenheim on the East River in Lower Manhattan,

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Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Berlin

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with yet more titanium swirls. A Guggenheim museum in New York City designed by Frank Gehry would no doubt attract millions of visitors. But will people really flock to New Orleans to see the Grammy Hall of Fame—a recently announced project that, according to its backers, "will have the 'wow factor' not found at the Experience Music Project"? Will the new addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum, by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, which features a giant kinetic sunshade resembling a flapping pair of pterodactyl wings, bring in throngs? Will Toronto, soon to have a dramatic addition to its Royal Ontario Museum designed by Daniel Libeskind (whose Jewish Museum in Berlin attracted 350,000 visitors in two years before it even had any exhibits), be the new Bilbao? Maybe, maybe not. A year and a half after the opening of the Experience Music Project attendance was down by more than a third, leading to a layoff of 124 employees. This may be partly because of September 11, but it is worth noting that during the same period the number of visitors to the local art museum increased by more than a third.

Whatever effect the Bilbao phenomenon will have on the way that tourists choose their destinations, it has already had a major influence on the way that clients, especially museums, choose their architects. In 1967, when the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C., was planning an addition to its building, it solicited portfolios from a dozen prominent architects, and after narrowing the list down to four (Kevin Roche, Philip Johnson, Louis I. Kahn, and I. M. Pei), museum officials visited the finalists' buildings as well as their offices. Only *after* the choice was made did the winner—Pei—get down to work on a design. Three years ago, when the Corcoran went looking for an architect, it, too, had a short list: Gehry, Libeskind, and Calatrava. Where Gehry billows, Libeskind zigs and zags. The Jewish Museum, his first major building, resembles a fragmented Star of David. This seemed to many a stroke of genius when the building was completed, in 1999, but it turns out that Libeskind is

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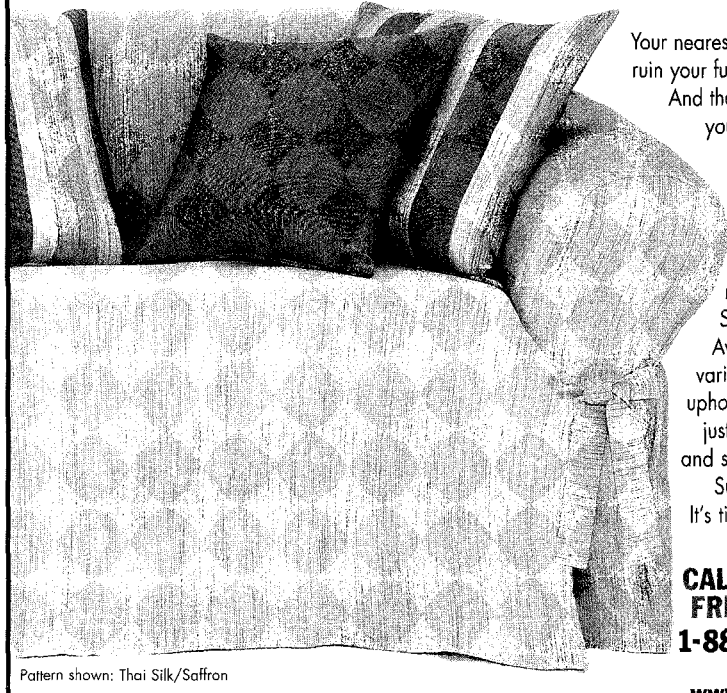

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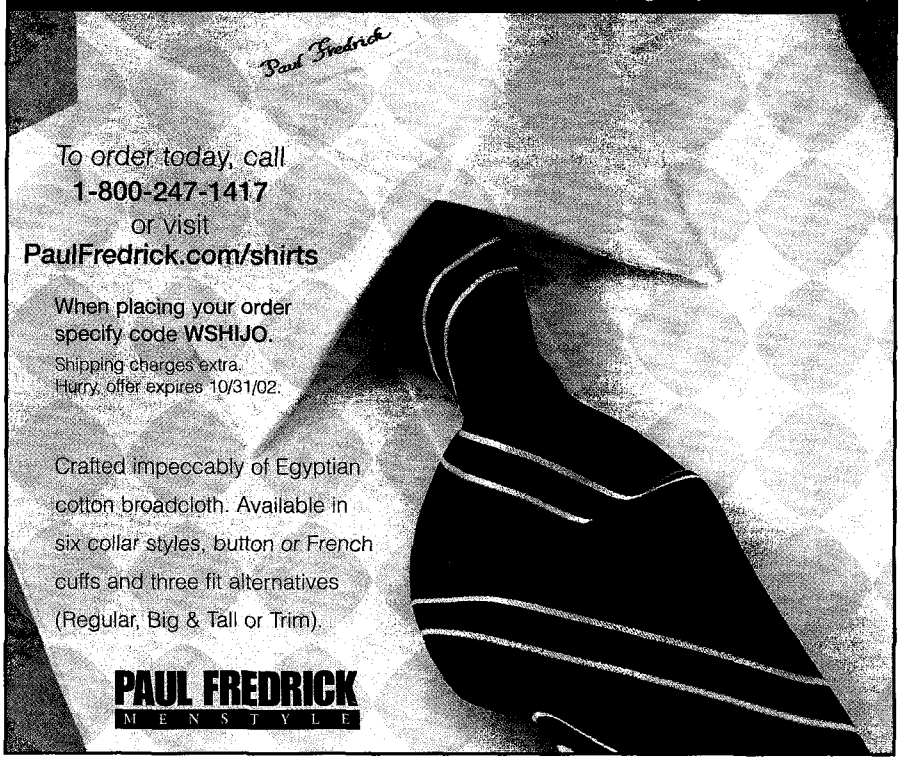

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simply partial to spiky, agitated forms. His winning design for an extension to the Denver Art Museum was described by *The New York Times* as a "dramatic glass-and-titanium jumble of rectangles and triangles." Calatrava's stylishly engineered structures, in contrast, resemble sun-bleached skeletons; they are "techno-Gothic," according to one commentator.

Rather than merely ponder the previous work of the three architects, the Corcoran commissioned each one to prepare a specific design. This kind of select competition, now the preferred way for choosing the architects of high-profile buildings, resembles a beauty pageant. With great fanfare a list of invited architects is announced. Their proposals are often exhibited, and sometimes the architects themselves give public presentations. The ranks of the competitors are winnowed. The anticipation is an important part of the publicity surrounding the proposed new building. When the Los Angeles County Museum of Art planned a major renovation and expansion, it invited five noteworthy architects to submit designs, including the ubiquitous Libeskind; Steven Holl, who was recently called "America's best architect" by *Time* magazine; and Thom Mayne, an avant-garde architect based in Los Angeles. Their proposals were eliminated in the first round of judging, leaving those of the Frenchman Jean Nouvel, whose best-known building is probably the Arab World Institute, in Paris, and Rem Koolhaas, a globe-trotting Dutch architect. Finally Koolhaas, who recently won a competition to design Seattle's new public library, was declared the winner.

I have no objection to architects' duking it out, and I think it's great that architecture is attracting so much attention. But I am skeptical that designing in the full glare of public competitions encourages architects to produce better buildings. The charged atmosphere promotes flamboyance rather than careful thought, and favors the glib and obvious over the subtle and nuanced. Architects have always entered competitions, but they have usually seasoned their talents first by doing commissioned work. Libeskind, Nouvel, Koolhaas, and other young architects of today have built their reputations almost entirely by participating in

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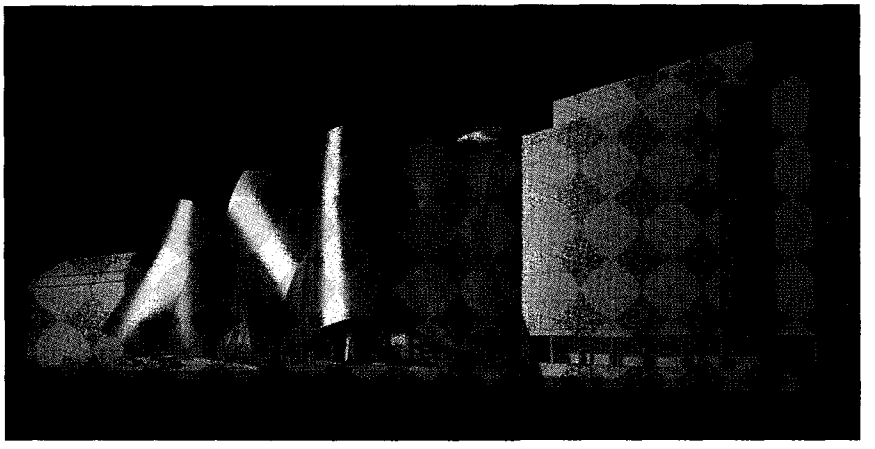
competitions; a friend of mine calls them "competition show dogs." And show dogs are rarefied creatures, often refined and styled to the point of caricature.

Some years ago, in *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour differentiated between buildings whose architectural image was chiefly the result of surface ornament applied to structures shaped by their functions and buildings whose image was the result of unusual forms. They called the former "decorated sheds" and the latter "ducks," a reference to a roadside stand on Long Island that sold poultry and was shaped like a duck. Italian Renaissance palazzi, for example, which are essentially straightforward buildings with exquisitely ornamented exteriors and interiors, are decorated sheds; Gothic cathedrals, with their flying buttresses, pinnacles, and steeples, are ducks. The point was less that one approach was better than the other—*Learning From Las Vegas* allowed that "both kinds of architecture are valid"—than that, historically speaking, ducks are few and far between. Venturi and his co-authors argued that clients are better served by decorated sheds than by dramatically modeled buildings, no matter how exciting. After all, it is the former approach that has produced some of our most memorable public buildings—Philadelphia's Academy of Music, New York's Metropolitan Museum, and the Boston Public Library.

Yet ducks are clearly in season, and Venturi himself has suffered the consequences of this trend. Some years ago his firm was commissioned to design a new concert hall for Philadelphia. The resulting proposal was a sensible building with an attractive performance space but a relatively modest exterior. However, as more and more cities announced plans for trophy buildings, the concert-hall backers decided that a decorated shed simply would not do. They dismissed the Venturi firm, increased the budget from $60 million to $265 million, and hired the New York–based Rafael Viñoly, who delivered the requisite "wow factor": an immense glass vault.

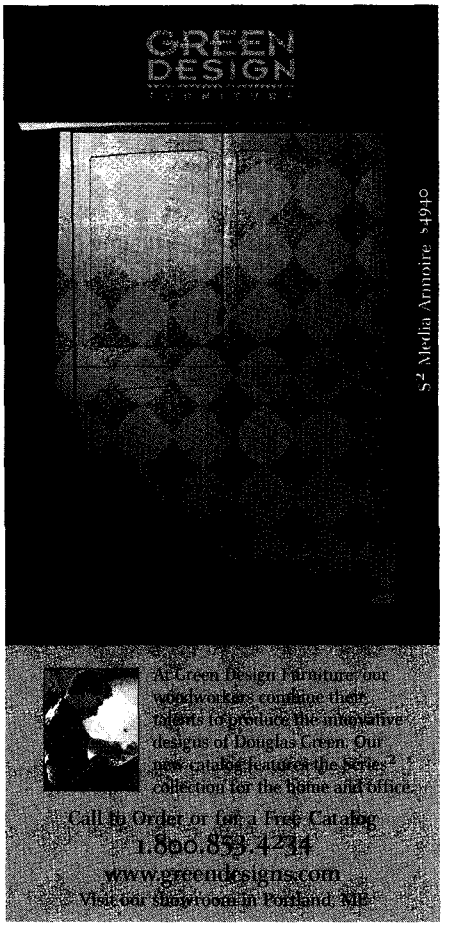
Viñoly's concert hall, known as the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, illustrates another aspect of the Bilbao effect. Show-dog architecture, especially in a signature style, is unlikely to pay much attention to its surroundings. Venturi's design was carefully inserted into its site on Broad Street, and its conservative exterior suited Quakerish Philadelphia, his home town. Viñoly's glass vault, however impressive its drama, is an alien presence. The devaluing of context is even more flagrant in international competitions, in which architects are expected to add major civic monuments to cities they may have visited only once or twice.

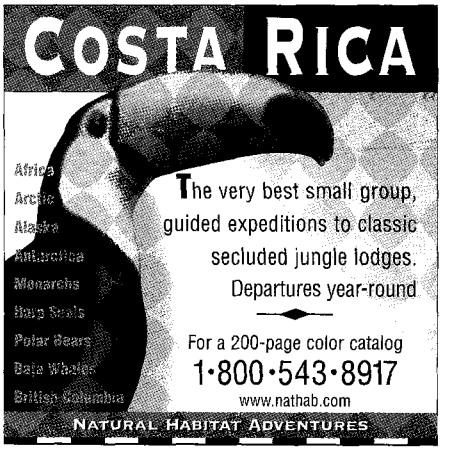


A model for Frank Gehry's new addition to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

WHIT PRESTON

One of the greatest American architects of the twentieth century was Louis I. Kahn. His best work, such as the Kimbell Art Museum, in Fort Worth; the Salk Institute, in La Jolla; and the Yale Center for British Art, was always directly commissioned. Although Kahn entered numerous competitions, he won only one, and in his later career he





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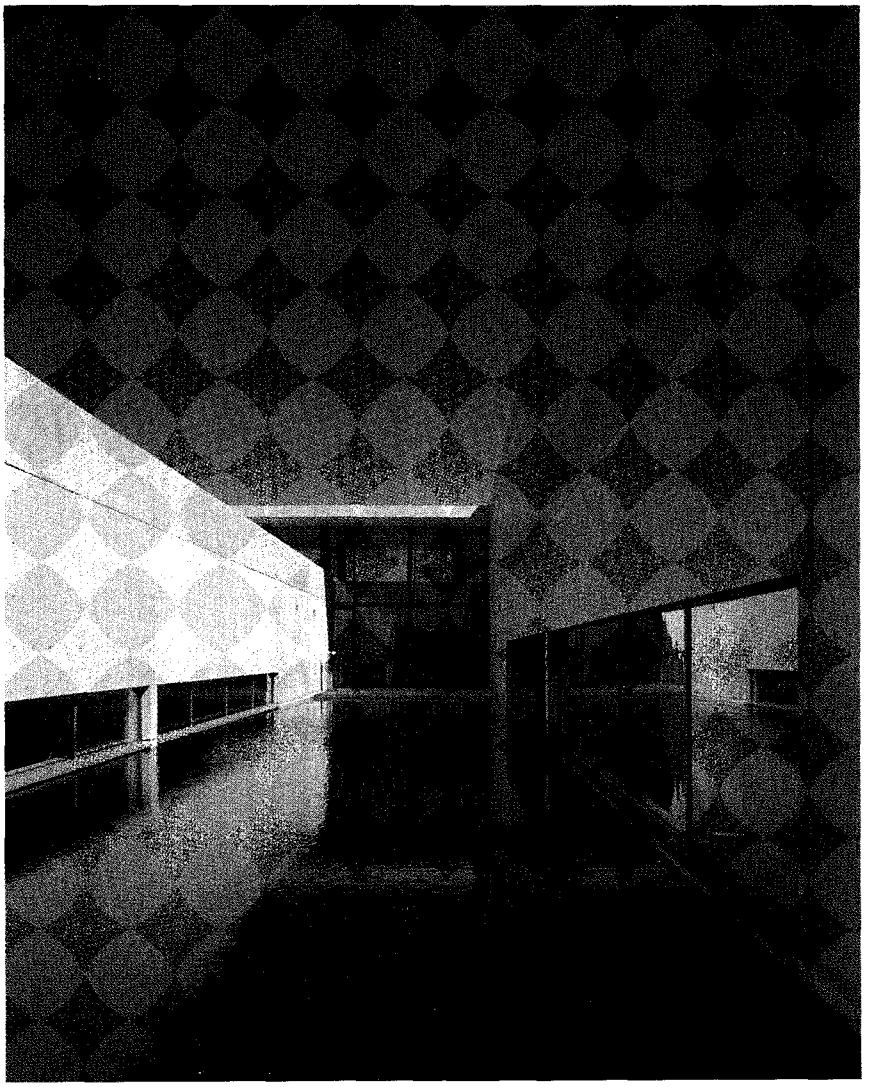
avoided competitions altogether. They did not suit him, because he developed his designs slowly, refining them in the process; his early sketches bear little resemblance to his finished buildings. Moreover, the qualities that made his architecture so good were poorly communicated in drawings and models. The buildings are uncomplicated; this is not eye-popping architecture. Benjamin Forgey, the architecture critic of *The Washington Post*, wrote of the Pulitzer Foundation, "It is almost dumbfounding in the United States to find an art museum whose interiors possess both the austerity and serenity of a Zen garden."



Tadao Ando's Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, St. Louis

buildings had to be experienced whole.

Kahn's spiritual successor is the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, whose accomplished designs earned him the 1995 Pritzker Prize. His first public building in the United States, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, in St. Louis, opened last year. Ando is a minimalist whose modest buildings depend on modulated natural light falling on simple materials—particularly concrete, which in his hands acquires a silky, sensuous texture. The forms of his

Emily Rauh Pulitzer, the president of the foundation, has said that the choice of Ando was based purely on aesthetics. Undoubtedly other architects were considered, but no design competition was involved. The question was who should be the architect, and the design came later. Indeed, the site of the museum was not yet final when Ando was commissioned. (His building, despite being abstract and minimalist in appearance, responds to its urban context very well.) To a degree that is not well understood, remarkable architecture is almost always the result of a dialogue between architect and client. Cut loose from this sort of creative conversation, few architects do their best work. The British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens once said, "There will never be great architects or architecture without great patrons." From the architect's point of view, the ideal project is not one with a magnanimous absent client. It is one with a magnanimous *thoughtful* client. In the Pulitzer Foundation, Ando had a thoughtful client; and he worked with Richard Serra and Ellsworth Kelly, two of the three artists whose works make up the permanent collection of this tiny museum. "My goal was to take to the limit the relationship between the works of art and the volume of the building's space," Ando has said.

The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts is a small building that was not meant to attract a vast public. Yet it would be nice to think that the building signals at least an alternative, if not an end, to the Bilbao effect. The chief aim of architecture should not be to entertain, titillate, or shock viewers. After the third example of swirling titanium and colliding prisms, the effect begins to wear thin. Le Corbusier understood this, which is why he did not repeat the sculptural effects of Ronchamp in other buildings. Once was enough. Beauty, along with function and structure, has of course always been a concern of architects. But true architectural beauty has a particular nature: calm and considered, standing to one side of fast and furious fashion. After all, buildings are built for the ages. They are not one-night stands, like blockbuster movies or blockbuster art shows. That's why architecture should be conservative in its instincts. The "wow factor" may excite the visitor and the journalist, but it is a shaky foundation on which to build lasting value. Great architecture carries many messages, about society and individuals, about our values and our dreams. It should have more to say to us than "Look at me."

Witold Rybczynski is the Martin and Margy Meyerson Professor of Urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book, The Perfect House: A Journey With the Renaissance Master Andrea Palladio, *will be published this month.*

ROBERT PETTUS

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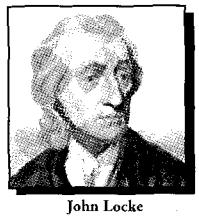
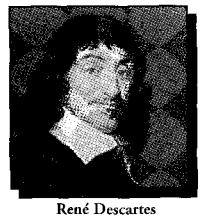

John Locke


René Descartes

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It comes from the Greek words meaning "love of wisdom." In English, we call it philosophy—the study of the most basic questions we humans have ever pondered. Questions like, What is reality? What are the limits of knowledge? What is (or is not) moral?

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He is author or editor of more than 40 books, including *Wild Beasts & Idle Humours: The Insanity Defense from Antiquity to the Present* (Harvard, 1996), *An Intellectual History of Psychology* (3rd edition, Wisconsin, 1995), *The Mind: An Oxford Reader* (Oxford, 1998) *and Aristotle's Psychology* (Columbia, 1989).

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BOOKS & CRITICS

BOOKS

LIGHTNESS AT MIDNIGHT

Stalinism without irony

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

.....

In his superb memoir, *Experience* (2000), Martin Amis almost casually expends a terrific line in a minor footnote. Batting away a critic he describes as "humorless," he adds, "And by calling him humorless I mean to impugn his seriousness, categorically: such a man must rig up his probity *ex nihilo*." A book in which such an observation can occur in passing is a very rich and dense one. Amis has won and held the attention of an audience eager for something very like this in reverse—a synthesis of astonishing wit and moral assiduity. Even the farcical episodes of his fiction are set on the bristling frontiers of love and death and sex. With his other hand, so to speak, he has raised the standard of essayistic reviewing, mounting guard over our muscular but vulnerable English language and registering fastidious pain whenever it is hurt or insulted. It is no accident, because he intuits the strong connection between linguistic and political atrocity, that he has also composed short but concentrated meditations on the three great collapses of twentieth-century modernism and civilization. With *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), and its accompanying flight of articles and polemics, he investigated the diseased relationship between suicide and genocide that is disclosed by the preparation of thermonuclear extinction. In *Time's Arrow* (1991) he made a very assured attempt to find a new literary mode for the subject of genocide *tout court*, and for the Nazi-generated race murder in particular. *Koba the Dread* aims to complete this triptych by interrogating the subject of Stalinism and the Great Terror.

KOBA THE DREAD: LAUGHTER AND THE TWENTY MILLION

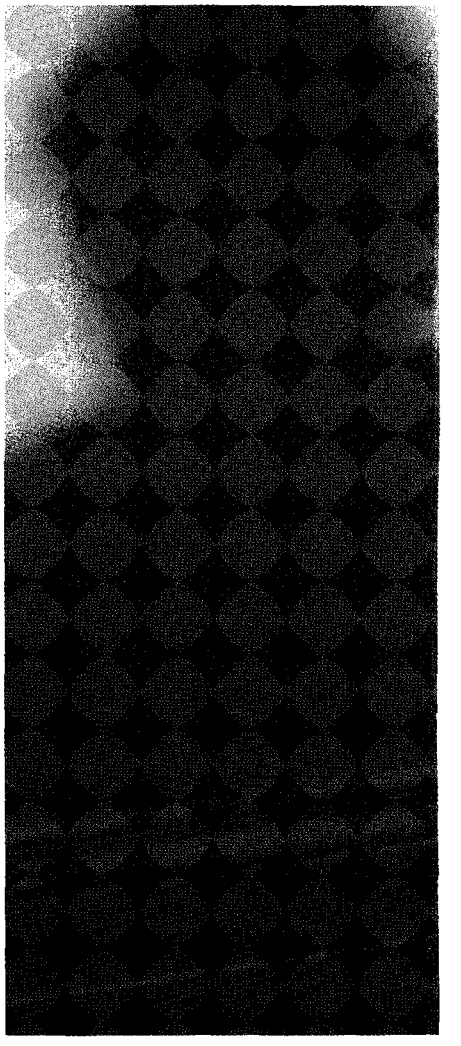
by Martin Amis

Talk Miramax Books
306 pages, $24.95

Amis's two previous undertakings of this kind were reviewed ungenerously in some quarters, either because they seemed presumptuous in taking a familiar subject and presenting it as if for the first time, or because they relied a little too much on a senior source (Jonathan Schell in the first case, and Primo Levi in the second). To this I would respond rather as Winston Smith does when he has finished reading the occult "inner-party" book in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "The best books ... are those that tell you what you know already." Amis understands that cliché and banality constitute a menace to even the most apparently self-evident truths. "Holocaust" can become a tired synecdoche for war crimes in general. Before one knows it, one is employing terms like "nuclear exchange" and even "nuclear umbrella," and committing the mental and moral offense of euphemism. One must always seek for new means of keeping familiar subjects fresh, and raw.

Stalinism was, among other things, a triumph of the torturing of language. And, unlike Nazism or fascism or nuclear warfare, it secured at least the respect, and sometimes the admiration, of liberal intellectuals. Thus Amis's achievement in these pages is to make us wince again at things that we already "knew" while barely wasting a word or missing the implications of a phrase. Here is a short section titled "Rhythms of Thought":

> Stalin's two most memorable utterances are "Death solves all problems. No man, no problem" and (he was advising his interrogators on how best to elicit a particular confession) "Beat, beat and beat again."
>
> Both come in slightly different versions. "There is a man, there is a problem. No man, no problem." This is less epigrammatic, and more catechistic—more typical of Stalin's seminarian style (one thinks of his oration at Lenin's funeral and its liturgical back-and-forth).
>
> The variant on number two is: "Beat, beat, and, once again, beat."



REX FEATURES

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> Another clear improvement, if we want a sense of Stalin's rhythms of thought.

To that second paragraph Amis appends a footnote, saying:

> If Stalin had been a modern American he would not have used the word "problem" but the less defeatist and judgmental "issue". Actually, when you consider what Stalin tended to do to his enemies' descendants, the substitution works well enough.

That is excellent: dry without being too detached. Next I would instance Amis's citations from the various cruelties and torments documented by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

> This reader has endured none of them; and I will proceed with caution and unease. It feels necessary because torture, among its other applications, was part of Stalin's war against the truth. He tortured, not to force you to reveal a fact, but to force you to collude in a fiction.

Here is his close reading of the last paragraph of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Trotsky's closing stave reads,

> The language of the civilised nations has clearly marked off two epochs in the development of Russia. Where the aristocratic culture introduced into the world parlance such barbarisms as *tsar*, *pogrom*, *knout*, October has internationalised such words as *Bolshevik*, *soviet*, and *piatiletka*. This alone justifies the proletarian revolution, if you imagine that it needs justification.

Amis's first comment on this ensues directly. He adds to Trotsky's bombast the words "Which leaves you wondering if *piatiletka* is Russian for 'summary execution,' perhaps, or 'slave camp.'" There follows a footnote. (Like Gibbon, Amis seems to like to reserve the best for the footnotes.)

> I searched without success for *piatiletka* in five end-of-monograph glossaries. Its clinching "internationalisation," then, didn't last (although Hitler, and later Mao, took it up). *Piatiletka* means "five-year plan."

There is a very slight waste of words here, because the mordancy of Amis's second observation makes the first one seem merely taunting and sarcastic. But lapses of this kind are infrequent. When Amis summarizes a crux, it stays summarized. One doesn't have to have suffered torture and solitary confinement to get the point that is being made here:

> The confession was in any case merely part of a more or less inevitable process. When it was their turn to be purged, former interrogators (and all other Chekists) immediately called with a flourish for the pen and the dotted line.

One also wouldn't absolutely have to know which regime was under discussion: the potency of that *aperçu* derives from its disclosing of our animal nature.

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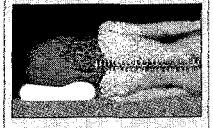

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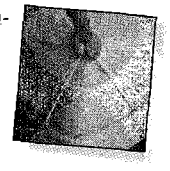

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Indeed, and as in his other work on murder and tyranny, Amis has a better than approximate idea of what we as a species might get up to if given a chance. "*Arma virumque cano*, and Hitler-Stalin tells us this, among other things: given total power over another, the human being will find that his thoughts turn to torture."

This is an insight of extreme, frigid bleakness, amounting almost to despair, but it also involves a minor waste of words. We knew this, after all, before we knew of Hitler or Stalin. Again to cite Orwell, there is a tendency for all stories of cruelty and atrocity to resemble one another. For this reason some overfamiliar or recycled accounts provoke boredom or disbelief, and can be made to seem propagandistic. (The classic example is the way the British fabrication of German outrages during World War I had the paradoxical effect of turning skeptics into cynics when they heard the initially incredible news of Nazi innovations in that terrible sphere.) Orwell was on guard against this blunting tendency. He thought it probable that given moral breakdown, the same hellish desires would replicate and repeat themselves. He also believed the worst about Stalin's system, and much earlier than most "enlightened" people, precisely because he found its public language so crude and brutal.

In a particularly luminous and funny passage on the correspondence between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson, Amis puts his entire trust in Nabokov's ability to employ language with care and discrimination, and shows that Wilson's journeyman prose practically rigged itself to trap him, and others, into a more comforting "explanation" of the titanic misery and failure of the Stalin years. (Amis doesn't make as much as he might of the fact that Nabokov produced his diamond-hard phrases in English, whereas his first language was Russian, while Wilson offered in return some thoughts about Russia that were trudging even in English.)

Stalin was no fool when he said that the death of one person is a tragedy, whereas the death of a million people is a statistic. Marx and Engels had always shuddered at the gross,

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enormous crudity of the steppe and the taiga, the illimitable reserves of primeval backwardness that they contained; and European liberalism had long been mesmerized by the Asiatic horror of Russian autocracy. This howling wilderness and boundless hinterland were themselves factors of "historical materialism." So, "in the execution of the broad brushstrokes of his hate," as Amis phrases it, Stalin "had weapons that Hitler did not have":

> He had cold: the burning cold of the Arctic. "At Oimyakon [in the Kolyma] a temperature has been recorded of -97.8 F. In far lesser cold, steel splits, tires explode and larch trees shower sparks at the touch of an axe ..."
>
> He had darkness: the Bolshevik sequestration, the shockingly bitter and unappeasable self-exclusion from the planet, with its fear of comparison, its fear of ridicule, its fear of truth.
>
> He had space: the great imperium with its eleven time zones, the distances that gave their blessing to exile and isolation...
>
> And, most crucially, Stalin had time.

In making the inescapable comparison with Hitler, who killed many fewer people (and even killed many fewer *Communists*) than Stalin, Amis is guided mostly by the view of Robert Conquest. He also relies, in varying degrees, on Martin Malia, Richard Pipes, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In Conquest's opinion, the visceral reaction to Nazism entails a verdict that it was morally worse than Stalinism, even if its eventual hecatomb was a less colossal one. This distinction rests on the sheer intentionality and obscenity of the *Shoah*, or Final Solution. Those who were killed in Ukraine, by a state-sponsored famine, were not killed as Ukrainians in quite the same way as the Ukrainian Jews of Babi Yar were later killed as Jews. The slave system of the gulag did not have as its primary objective the turning of living people into corpses. The huge callousness of the system simply allowed vast numbers to be treated as expendable.

The distinction is certainly worth preserving. As Amis phrases it, "When I read about the Holocaust I experience something that I do not experience when I read about the Twenty Million: a sense of physical infestation. This is species shame." To this one might add that Germany was a literate, democratic, and advanced civilization before the Nazis got to it, whereas Russia at the time of the 1905 revolution was in a condition more like that of Turkey, or Iran, or even (in some areas) Afghanistan today. It did have a "Westernized" industrial and intellectual element, but it was from exactly this stratum that Marxism drew most of its followers. And many of them regarded the mass of the Russian people in much the way that a British official in early colonial Bengal might have viewed the benighted natives. Probably, if we look for explanations for the indulgence shown toward Stalinism by men like George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, we will find part of the answer in the quasi-eugenic and quasi-anthropological approach they took to most questions. (Fabian socialism, in the same period, emphasized the progressive aspects of social engineering in the British Empire.) But Amis, who briefly mocks the gullibility of the Bloomsbury and *New Statesman* tradition, also forgets that the *grand prix* for prescience here belongs to the atheist, socialist, and anti-imperialist Bertrand Russell, whose *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920) was the first and in many ways the most penetrating critique.

I don't know if it was at this point or a slightly later one that I realized that Amis was exhibiting a tendency to flail. There is certainly merit in restating Stalin's exorbitant and lustful criminality, which stands comparison to that of the most paranoid and sanguinary moments of antiquity as well as of modernity. (The title *Koba the Dread* is an amalgam of Stalin's nickname and the more straightforward Russian meaning of "the Terrible," as in Ivan.) But we have grown up reading Solzhenitsyn, Joseph Berger, Eugenia Ginzburg, Lev Kopelev, Roy Medvedev, and many other firsthand chroniclers of the nightmare. Names like Vorkuta and Kolyma are not as familiar to most people as Treblinka or Birkenau, but the word "gulag" (one of the many hateful acronyms of the system) does duty for the whole, and is known to everybody. Amis appears to deny this when he says that a general recognition of the toll of Stalinist slavery and murder "hasn't happened," and that "in the general consciousness the Russian dead sleep on." He should have hesitated longer before taking the whole weight of responsibility for this memory, and our memory, on his shoulders.

The clue to this hubris comes in the second part of his title, with its allusion to mirth. Amis is acutely, vibrantly sensitive to the different registers of laughter. He knows that it can be the most affirming and uniquely human sound, and also the most sinister and animalistic one. He understands every note of every octave that separates the liberating shout of mirth from the cackle of a bully or the snigger of a sadist. (Nabokov's title "Laughter in the Dark" provides a perfect pitch here.) So he's in confident form when he describes the servile laughter that greeted Stalin when he was "forcibly" induced to take the stage at the Bolshoi Theater in 1937, and modestly agreed to be a candidate in the upcoming "election." Here is some of the transcript, according to Dmitri Volkogonov:

> Of course, I could have said something light about anything and everything. [laughter] ... I understand there are masters of that sort of thing not just in the capitalist countries, but here, too, in our Soviet country. [laughter, applause]...

Many surviving eyewitnesses of many tyrannical courts have told us that the most exacting and nerve-straining moments come when the despot is in a good mood. Stalin had perhaps the most depraved and limited humor of

Amis's newly acquired zeal forbids him to see a joke even when it is handed to him on a skewer with béarnaise sauce. His want of wit here compromises his seriousness.

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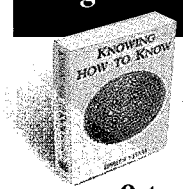

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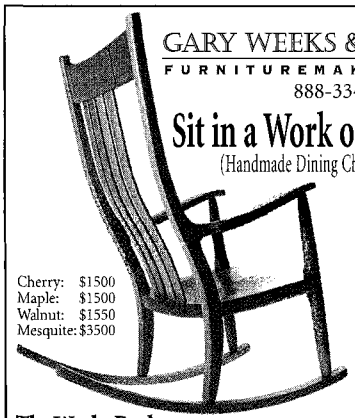

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the lot. In addition to being a grand-opera widow-and-orphan manufacturer, and widow-and-orphan *slayer*, he was a sniggerer and a bad chuckler. Amis observes of the foul scene above:

> Ground zero of the Great Terror—and here was the Party, joined in a panic attack of collusion in yet another enormous lie. They clapped, they laughed. Did *he* laugh? Do we hear it—the "soft, dull, sly laugh," the "grim, dark laughter, which comes up from the depths"?

However, Amis also refers to laughter of a somewhat different sort, and here, having called attention to the splendors of this little book, I am compelled to say where I think it fails. And by "compelled" I suppose I must mean "obliged," since it appears on the author's own warrant that the book's shortcomings are mostly my fault. In the fall of 1999 Amis attended a meeting in London where I spoke from the platform. The hall was one of those venues (Cooper Union, in New York, might be an analogy) where the rafters had once echoed with the rhetoric of the left. I made an allusion to past evenings with old comrades, and the audience responded with what Amis at first generously terms "affectionate laughter." But then he gives way to the self-righteousness and superficiality that let him down.

> Why is it? Why is it? If Christopher had referred to his many evenings with many "an old blackshirt," the audience would have ... Well, with such an affiliation in his past, Christopher would not be Christopher—or anyone else of the slightest distinction whatsoever. Is *that* the difference between the little mustache and the big mustache, between Satan and Beelzebub? One elicits spontaneous fury, and the other elicits spontaneous laughter? And what kind of laughter is it? It is, of course, the laughter of universal fondness for that old, old idea about the perfect society. It is also the laughter of forgetting. It forgets the demonic energy unconsciously embedded in that hope. It forgets the Twenty Million.
>
> This isn't right:
>
> Everybody knows of Auschwitz and Belsen. Nobody knows of Vorkuta and Solovetski.
>
> Everybody knows of Himmler and Eichmann. Nobody knows of Yezhov and Dzerdzhinsky.
>
> Everybody knows of the six million of the Holocaust. Nobody knows of the six million of the Terror-Famine.

George Orwell once remarked that certain terrible things in Spain had really happened, and "they did not happen any the less because the *Daily Telegraph* has suddenly found out about them when it is five years too late." Martin Amis can be excused for coming across some of the above names and numbers rather late in life, but he cannot hope to get away with accusing others of keeping these facts and names from him, or from themselves. He tells me that this fairly unimportant evening was what kick-started his book, and in an open letter to me on the preceding pages he contemptuously, even proudly, asserts his refusal even to glance at Isaac Deutscher's biographical trilogy on Leon Trotsky. Well, I have my own, large differences with Deutscher. But nobody who read his *Prophet Outcast*, which was published more than three decades ago, could possibly be uninstructed about Vorkuta or Yezhov. In other words, having demanded to know "Why is it?" in such an insistent tone, he doesn't stay to answer his own question, instead replacing it with a vaguely peevish and "shocked, shocked" version of "How long has this been going on?" The answer there is, longer than he thinks.

With infinitely more distress I have to add that Amis's newly acquired zeal forbids him to see a joke even when (as Bertie Wooster puts it) it is handed to him on a skewer with béarnaise sauce. The laughter in that hall was slightly shabby, I am quite prepared to agree. But it was the resigned laughter that "sees" a poor jest, and recognizes the fellow sufferer. In related anecdotes that are too obviously designed to place himself in a good light, Amis also recounts some aggressive questions allegedly put by him to me and to James Fenton in our (James's and my) Trotskyist years, when all three of us were colleagues at *The New Statesman*. The questions are so plainly wife-beating questions, and the answers so clearly intended to pacify the aggressor by offering a mocking agreement, that I have to set down a judgment I would once

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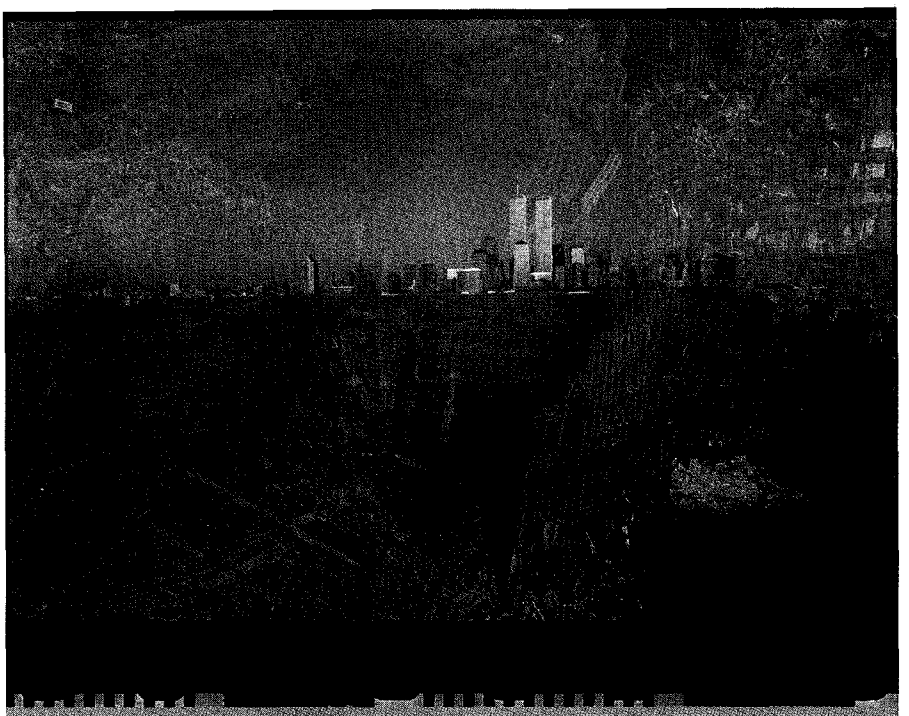
have thought unutterable. Amis's want of wit here, even about a feeble joke, compromises his seriousness.

I would be as solipsistic as he is if I persisted too long with this, so I redirect attention. In the excerpt above has he made up his mind about the moral equivalence between Stalin and Hitler? Or has he reserved the right to use the cudgel according to need? When he speaks of Ivan the Terrible and Joseph Stalin, does he mean to say that there was something comparable in their "Great Russian" ancestry? When he dilates upon torture and forced confessions, or upon the practice of eliminating even the families of opponents, is he suggesting that such terror was unknown to humanity before 1917? He states at one point, "Until I read *Man Is Wolf to Man: Surviving Stalin's Gulag* I had never heard of a prisoner, en route, lying crushed and ground on a section of rough wood and receiving a succession of monstrous splinters up and down his back." One would not need to refer him to the Nazi transports from Salonika or Vichy. An allusion to the Middle Passage, or to the hell ships that populated Australia's "Fatal Shore," would be enough. Moral equivalence is not intended here. But moral uniqueness requires a bit more justification.

I do not mean these to sound like commissar questions, or wife-beating questions either. On the first and perhaps most important one posed by Amis, for example, I find that I never quite know what I think myself about this moral equivalence. Nor did I quite know when I was still a member of a Marxist/post-Trotskyist group, when such matters were debated from dawn until dusk, often with furious or thuggish Communists. However, I do know from that experience, which was both liberating and confining, that the crucial questions about the gulag were being asked by left oppositionists, from Boris Souvarine to Victor Serge to C.L.R. James, in real time and at great peril. Those courageous and prescient heretics have been somewhat written out of history (they expected far worse than that, and often received it), but I can't bring myself to write as if they



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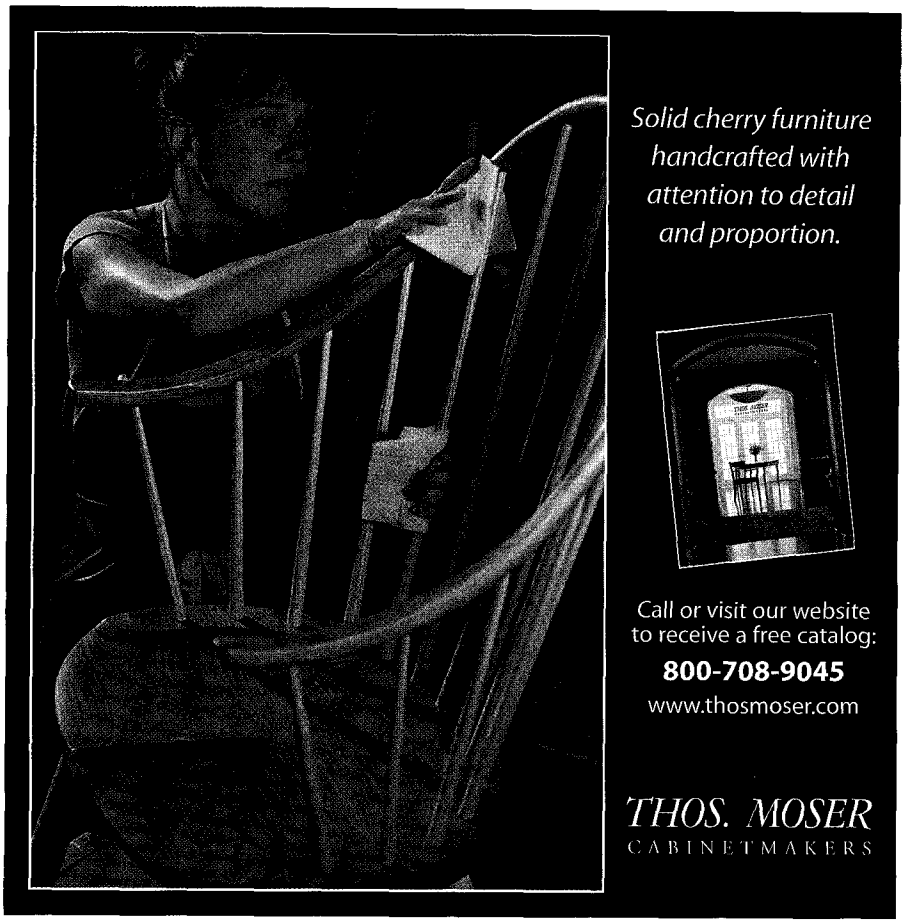

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never existed, or to forgive anyone who slights them. If they seem too Marxist in tendency, one might also mention the more heterodox work of John Dewey, Sidney Hook, David Rousset, or Max Shachtman in exposing "Koba's" hideous visage. The "Nobody" at the beginning of Amis's sentences above is an insult, pure and simple, and an insult to history, too.

History is more of a tragedy than it is a morality tale. The will to power, the will to use human beings in social experiments, is to be distrusted at all times. The impulse to create, or even to propose, what Amis calls "the perfect society" is likewise to be suspected. At several points he states with near perfect simplicity that ideology is hostile to human nature, and implies that teleological socialism was uniquely or particularly so. I would no longer disagree with him about this. *Corruptio optimi pessima*: no greater cruelty will be devised than by those who are sure, or are assured, that they are doing good. However, one may come to such a conclusion by a complacent route or by what I would still dare to call a dialectical one. Does anybody believe that had the 1905 Russian Revolution succeeded, it would have led straight to the gulag, and to forced collectivization? Obviously not. Such a revolution might even have forestalled the Balkan wars and World War I. Yet that revolution's moving spirits were Lenin and Trotsky, defeated by the forces of autocracy, Orthodoxy, and militarism. Excuse me, but nobody can be bothered to argue much about whether fascism might have turned out better, given more propitious circumstances. And there were no dissidents in the Nazi Party, risking their lives on the proposition that the Führer had betrayed the true essence of National Socialism. As Amis half recognizes, in his *en passant* compliment to me, the question just doesn't come up.

Amis says he doesn't wish that World War II had gone the other way, which is good of him (though there were many Ukrainians and Russians who took their anti-Stalinism to the extent of enlistment on the Nazi side). However, it would be nice to know if he wishes that the Russian civil war,

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and the wars of intervention, had gone the other way. There are some reasons to think that had that been the case, the common word for fascism would have been a Russian one, not an Italian one. *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was brought to the West by the White emigration; even Boris Pasternak, in *Doctor Zhivago*, wrote with a shudder about life in the White-dominated regions. Major General William Graves, who commanded the American Expeditionary Force during the 1918 invasion of Siberia (an event thoroughly airbrushed from all American textbooks), wrote in his memoirs about the pervasive, lethal anti-Semitism that dominated the Russian right wing and added, "I doubt if history will show any country in the world during the last fifty years where murder could be committed so safely, and with less danger of punishment, than in Siberia during the reign of Admiral Kolchak." Thus "the collapse in the value of human life," as Amis describes the situation in post-revolutionary Russia, had begun some time before, perhaps in the marshes of Tannenberg, and was to make itself felt in other post–World War I societies as well.

Some confrontation with this line of thinking—I hesitate to use the word "context"—is essential if one is to avoid the merely one-dimensional or propagandistic. It might be concluded that upon reflection and analysis, the Bolshevik Revolution was the worst possible of the many available postwar outcomes, none of which (unlike Germany in 1933) included the prospect of parliamentary pluralism. It might also be concluded that Stalinism was the ineluctable and even the intended outcome of 1917, though this would involve some careful reasoning about whether things are or are not products of "historical inevitability." Yet Amis simply evades the question with a couple of sneers, saying that my argument "would have more weight behind it if (a) there had been a similar collapse (i.e., total, and lasting thirty-five years) in any other combatant country, and if (b) a single Old Bolshevik had spent a single day at the front, or indeed in the army." Well, even the collapse of post-war Germany into the arms of first the *Freikorps* and then their successors doesn't seem to meet his first exacting condition, at least in point of duration (though the enforced shortening of the Nazi period did involve some fairly harsh decisions about the value of human life). As for the second sneer, is Amis telling us that he hasn't read, for example, Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*? Bolshevism was in some ways a product of the hard-line front fighters. Indeed, its very militarization was one of the several reasons for its ugliness.

In the best sections of this book Amis makes the extraordinary demand that, in effect, the human species should give up on teleology and on all forms of "experiment" on fellow creatures. He is being much more revolutionary here than perhaps he appreciates.

Hard work is involved in the study of history. Hard moral work, too. We don't get much assistance in that task from mushy secondhand observations like this one:

> Accounting, as a Catholic, for his belief in evil as a living force, the novelist Anthony Burgess once said, "There is no A.J.P. Taylor-ish explanation for what happened in Eastern Europe during the war." Nor is there.

Oh, yes. And what might the Catholic explanation be? The Church is still trying to find new ways of apologizing for its role in these events, and for things like the Nazi puppet regime in Slovakia, which was actually headed by a priest. Of course, original sin would be just as persuasive a verdict as any other the Church might offer. But tautology is the enemy of historical inquiry: if we are all evil, then everything becomes a matter of degree. Amis for some reason has a special horror of Bolshevik anti-clericalism, and writes as

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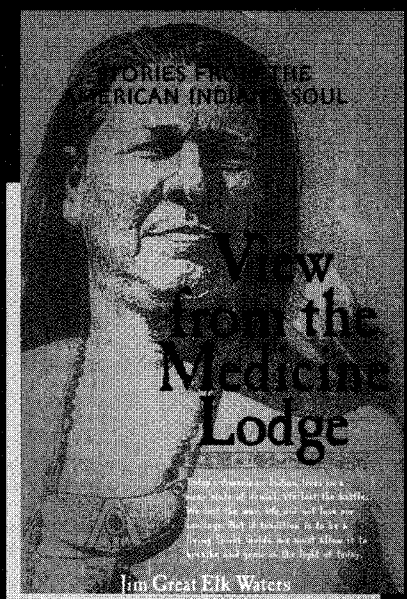

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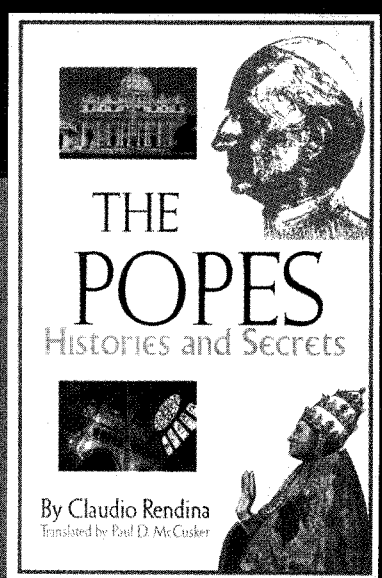

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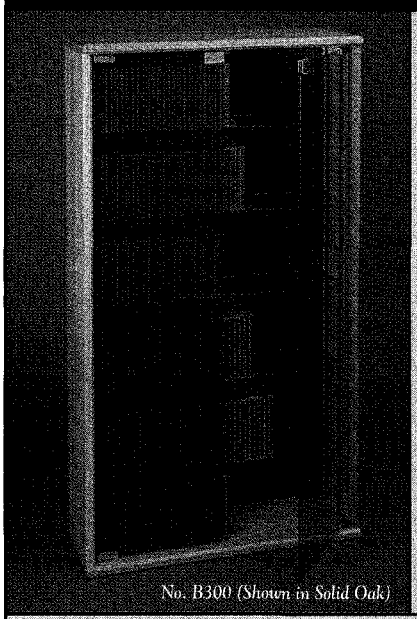

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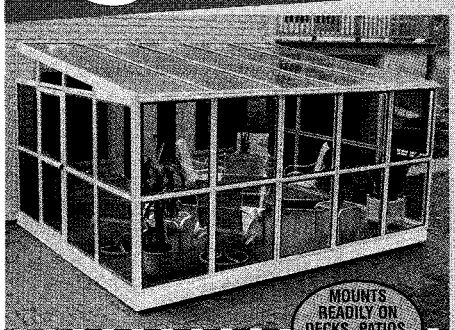

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if the Czarist Russian Orthodox Church was some kind of relief organization run by nuns. If he would look even at the recent performance of state-sponsored militant Orthodoxy in Bosnia ... Incidentally, do not the Churches also insist on trying to perfect the imperfectible, and on forcing the human shape into unnatural attitudes? Surely the "totalitarian" impulse has a common root with the proselytizing one. The "internal organs," as the Cheka and the GPU and the KGB used to style themselves, were asked to police the mind for heresy as much as to torture *kulaks* to relinquish the food they withheld from the cities. If there turns out to be a connection between the utilitarian and the totalitarian, then we wretched mammals are in even worse straits than we suspect.

Amis might have profited from studying the novelistic gold standard here, which is Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler's theory of Stalin's grim success, which was that some of his old Bolshevik victims half feared that "Koba" might be correct after all, is only partly superseded by the "beat, beat and beat again" account, which itself is an insufficient explanation for the actual capitulation of the defendants. (A handful of the old comrades, after all, never cracked.) But his theory allowed for a very illuminating fictional dramatization of the relationship of ideas to outcomes. And Koestler put such persuasive words into the mouth of the interrogator Gletkin—his version of the Grand Inquisitor—that some English and French readers (John Strachey most notably) were actually *persuaded* by them. That unintended consequence was obviously limited. But it points to an essential difference. Koestler exposed the ghastliness of Stalinism by means of a sophisticated deployment of historical irony, whereas Amis—and again I startle myself by saying this—has decided to dispense with irony altogether. (He mentions, with all the gravity of one returning from a voyage of discovery, that the sailors of Kronstadt fought against the Bolsheviks under red flags and with revolutionary slogans. He even italicizes the word "revolutionaries," as if this point were at the expense of the left

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opposition. As Daniel Bell pointed out decades ago, the only real argument among members of the old left was about the point at which their own personal "Kronstadt" had occurred. Bell was proud to say that Kronstadt itself had been his "Kronstadt.")

Writing toward the very end of his life, a life that had included surprising Stalin himself by a refusal to confess, and the authorship of a novel—*The Case of Comrade Tulayev*—that somewhat anticipated *Darkness at Noon*, Victor Serge could still speak a bit defensively about the bankruptcy of socialism in the "midnight of the century" represented by the Hitler-Stalin pact. But he added,

> Have you forgotten the other bankruptcies? What was Christianity doing in the various catastrophes of society? What became of Liberalism? What has Conservatism produced, in either its enlightened or its reactionary form? ... If we are indeed honestly to weigh out the bankruptcies of ideology, we shall have a long task ahead of us.

In the best sections of this book Amis makes the extraordinary demand that, in effect, the human species should give up on teleology and on all forms of "experiment" on fellow creatures. He is being much more revolutionary here than perhaps he appreciates. Had he allowed himself to ponder the implications, he might have engaged fruitfully with some of his own earlier work on fascism and on thermonuclear gamesmanship—two absolutist theories and practices that had in common the view that Leninism was the main enemy. If it matters, I now agree with him that perfectionism and messianism are the chief and most lethal of our foes. But I can't quite write as if a major twentieth-century tragedy had been enacted to prove that I was correct in the first place. And I don't say this just because I *wasn't* correct. After all, the most valiant of the historians and the resisters in our own time was undoubtedly Solzhenitsyn, who has now descended into a sort of "Great Russian" spiritual and political quackery, replete with nostrums about the national "soul" and euphemisms about pogroms and anti-Semitism. Amis should be self-aware enough to admit that this is an "ideology" too.

His is a short work, and one cannot ask for a complete theory of modern ideology and the various deathtraps it sets for the body and the mind. However, much of the space that could have been devoted to a little inquiry is instead given over to some rather odd reflections on Amis's family life, featuring some vignettes about his offspring and a meditation on the sadly short term that was set to the life of his younger sister. Few people could be more sympathetic to his children than I am (one of those children is my godson). But what is this doing? A baby daughter screams inconsolably one night and forces her father to summon the nanny.

> "The sounds she was making," I said unsmilingly to my wife on her return, "would not have been out of place in the deepest cellars of the Butyrki Prison in Moscow during the Great Terror. That's why I cracked and called Caterina."

From darkness at noon to ... lightness at midnight. There's quite a lot more in the same vein. I find it inexplicable, partly because I can easily imagine the scorn with which Amis would write about anyone else who employed the Terror for purposes of relativism. His own purpose, presumably, is to refute Stalin's foul inhumanity by showing that an individual, too, can be a considerable "statistic." But the transition from macro- to micro-humanity is uneasy at its best.

Slightly easier to take is his letter to his late father, who was a believing Communist for many of the Stalin years, and whose irrational dogmatism is set down, probably rightly, to a series of emotional and attitudinal and familial complexes. In *Experience*, in contrast, we saw old Kingsley as he declined into a sort of choleric, empurpled Blimpishness, culminating in his denunciation of Nelson Mandela as a practitioner of Red Terror. The lessons here ought to have been plain: Be very choosy about what kind of anti-communist you are, and be careful not to confuse the state of the world with that of your family, or your own "internal organs."

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair *and* The Nation. *His most recent book,* Why Orwell Matters, *will be published in October.*

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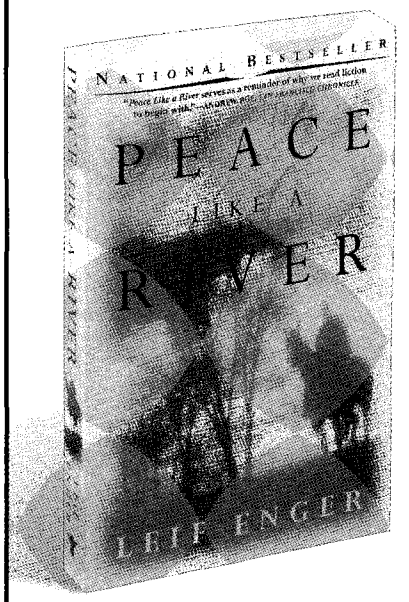

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NEW & NOTEWORTHY

A cautionary classic; the subject of motherhood made new and fine; Ambrose Bierce's Civil War

.....

THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE, OR ILLUMINATION

by Harold Frederic

Modern Library
358 pages, $19.95

Don't be put off by the opening of this neglected American tragicomedy. True, the first chapter is written with a Hawthorne-like formality, and its subject matter—the closing session of the annual Nedahma Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church—seems tediously dated (the book was originally published in 1896). But if you persevere through these nine pages (appreciating Harold Frederic's sly commentary on the decline of religious leadership in the nineteenth century), you'll be rewarded. Reissued as part of the Modern Library paperback series that pairs classic texts with introductory essays by distinguished contemporary writers (in this case Joyce Carol Oates), this satiric examination of a naif led astray by sophisticates is a terrific novel. With an incisive eye for the power of ambition, self-regard, and self-delusion, Frederic mercilessly, albeit good-naturedly, exposes the weaknesses of his young minister, Theron Ware, by setting a trap for him similar to the one Sinclair Lewis set for Carol Kennicott in *Main Street*: Theron is clearly brighter than the provincials who surround him and who, to his frustration, fail to appreciate his talent. Yet he is so uneducated and so unworldly that he cannot help looking the fool when, believing he has "been invited to become a citizen" of a world in which "men asked one another, not 'Is your soul saved?' but 'Is your mind well furnished?'" he tries to set himself above his dull flock. Certainly, elements of the plot—Theron's attraction, for instance, to the gorgeous and independent-minded Celia Madden—are predictable. However, she, together with her friends, a jaded priest and a dry scientist, plays an original and cruel game that is far more compelling than a simple romance. They charm Theron (and fascinate the reader) with intellectual discussions and, to him, radical views on subjects such as biblical history, Catholicism, the role of religion in America, music, the attitudes of the ancient Greeks, and women's rights. Revealing a markedly contemporary sensibility, as Oates points out, Frederic refuses to say whether Theron's new knowledge damns or enlightens him (hence the alternate titles), and the ending is no less than brilliant in its understanding of the shallowness and the consequent resilience of the modern American. —*CHRISTINA SCHWARZ*

THE BOOK OF ILLUSIONS

by Paul Auster

Henry Holt, 336 pages, $24.00

"Hip intellectual" is an oxymoron in this country, and it is therefore appropriate that the hip, intellectual novelist Paul Auster should be a little less popular here than he is in France, where no such contradiction is recognized. Auster has always written from the head rather than the heart. All his novels are built on cerebral conceits, and in spite of his oft observed fascination with chance, coincidence, and contingency, his books are painstakingly constructed: characters are emblems as opposed to people; situations are created out of a feeling for dramatic symmetry rather than from the all-too-messy urgency of human passion. The results can be compelling, but they tend to be on the dry side.

With his new novel, Auster seems to be attempting to work in a more emotional vein, but the effort is not very successful, because the central catastrophe has occurred before the action begins: when we first meet the narrator, a professor of literature named David Zimmer, he is trying to recover from the recent death of his wife and two sons in an airplane accident. This is a subject that can hardly fail to harrow any reader, so our empathy with David is cheaply bought, allowing Auster to get away with mere formulaic breast-beating and hair-tearing before heading into the main part of the plot. This describes David's involvement with the silent-film comedian Hector Mann, who disappeared mysteriously nearly sixty years earlier and on whose career David is the only living expert. Hector turns out to be still alive, and as David gets drawn into the comedian's bizarre subsequent history, he discovers that their two lives have taken parallel courses. At the same time, he turns from death back toward life, aided by characters (or signifiers) with suggestive names like Alma and Frieda. *The Book of Illusions* is too allegorical to be emotionally affecting, and although it's perfectly readable, its prose is bland and undistinguished, its dialogue trite—every character talks exactly like David Zimmer himself. And, like all Auster's novels, it makes its careful architecture just a little too evident. —*BROOKE ALLEN*

A LIFE'S WORK: ON BECOMING A MOTHER

by Rachel Cusk

Picador USA, 213 pages, $22.00

Anyone who has ever been cornered at a cocktail party by a zealous "at-home mother" understands why most books on motherhood are such stinkers: the experience is so common that almost all observations about it are banal. For this reason, the novelist Rachel Cusk's new book on the old topic is a wonder. Cusk has written something fine and beautiful; the precision of her language and the depth of her insights lend such homey, unremarkable subjects as breastfeeding and engaging a babysitter an almost shocking newness. Motherhood is frequently a target for the broadest kind of humor, but although Cusk's book is sometimes very funny, she doesn't play for yucks, and this restraint brings a dignity to the

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subject and the experience that most of the other books lack. Her critical reading of modern child-care manuals—themselves an oft attempted and frequently botched form—is peerless. "Most of these books begin," she writes, "with a sort of apocalyptic scenario in which the world we know has vanished, replaced by another in whose principles we must be educated." "[Spock is] a fund of information on most things, having appointed himself a sort of missionary to aid those inhabitants of swamps, mines and oil platforms who are mysteriously beyond the reach of the medical profession. His prose is full of danger and emergency." "[Penelope Leach] has a schoolteacher's plain grasp of Freud and Winnicott ... Like Mary Poppins, like someone in a fairy-tale, she is on the side of children."

Rachel Cusk was troubled by new motherhood in a way that I was not—I embraced it like a giddy ninny, whereas she is an intellectual. Very smart women have always had some difficulty with motherhood, which is an assault on many things but primarily on one's ability to think and to be utterly independent of others. Like many other intellectuals, Cusk seems to lack a measure of common sense, which leads to some antic and amusing episodes: for example, her hiring—as a spectacularly unsuccessful nanny—a dapper little Slovenian man who during the job interview drank wine, smoked a cigarette, and described his dissertation on transportation links to London's airports. But nothing can compare with the book's observations about the difficult weeks spent at home with a new baby ("The days pass slowly. Their accustomed structure, the architecture of the past, has gone") or the high emotional cost of taking some time away from one's child: "When I leave her the world bears the taint of my leaving, so that abandonment must now be subtracted from the sum of whatever I choose to do. A visit to the cinema is no longer that: it is less, a tarnished thing, an alloyed pleasure." That *A Life's Work* seems not to be finding its audience is a pity; I can't imagine that anyone who is both a reader and a mother will be unmoved by it. —*CAITLIN FLANAGAN*

ANSWERS TO THE JULY/AUGUST PUZZLER

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"Lost in the Funhouse"

Dropped and added letters spell WILD RIDE. *Across.* A. CRESSIDA (anag.) B. W(ADD)ING (*Dad* anag.) C. RODE (homophone) D. M(A + GENT)A E. GAT(E)S F. R + E(V)ERIE G. RE(M)IT (*tire* anag.) H. TRIP + E I. S(MAR)T J. DEARTHS (anag.) K. MINED (homophone) L. SPO(U)T M. NOTES (anag.) N. CASTILE (anag.) O. S(WAR)'D (rev.) P. AVERT (hidden) Q. LLAM(A)S (*small* rev.) R. DEER (rev.) S. WHALING (double def.) T. ASTER (anag.) U. DESERTS (double def.) *Down.* 1. SEMIPRO (anag.); VE(S)T 2. DA(N)TE; STATER (anag.) 3. COT + ERIE; WA(Y)NE 4. A(DAM) + ANT; AMIS(s) 5. RE + GI + ME; (m)ORALS 6. A + GREE(k)S; CEDAR (anag.) 7. DIVER + T; S + TARS

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"The real war," Walt Whitman despaired of our Civil War, "will never get into the books." With one honorable and merciless exception, he was right. To the very few writers who experienced the fighting and to the far larger number who didn't, the war was unfathomable, or at least indescribable. Ambrose Bierce, a fierce-eyed, extraordinarily brave soldier who fought with the Army of the Ohio for nearly the entire length of the conflict—at, among other killing fields, Shiloh, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, and Kennesaw Mountain—and who was later a reporter, an editor, and a short-story writer, produced the only truly honest writing to emerge from combat. *Phantoms of a Blood-Stained Period* (the title is taken from Bierce's harrowing memoir "What I Saw of Shiloh") collects all of Bierce's writing on the war: his historical reportage on and astonishingly detailed memoirs of specific battles; his letters; and, of course, his surreal short stories (he used all these forms to convey the battle of Chickamauga). An hour with this superbly edited volume will cure any Civil War buff, for Bierce was, as H. L. Mencken declared, "the first writer of fiction ever to treat war realistically" and the first to grasp that soldiers in combat were little different from "bewildered animals dying like hogs in Chicago [stockyards]." Bierce disdained the North's sanctimonious notion of the war as the Battle Cry of Freedom no less than the South's romantic idea of the Lost Cause; he saw the conflict as a meaningless and murderous enterprise. Whether he is depicting wild boars eating the entrails of still-living battlefield casualties, or the incineration of a company of soldiers in the forest at Shiloh ("gallant gentlemen who had got what they had enlisted for"), or a boy coming upon his dead mother at Chickamauga, her brains blown out by a shell, Bierce's sensibility is sardonic, grotesque, hallucinatory, modern. And his short stories, which concentrate on single incidents at the edges of battle, some bounded by only a few minutes, are distinguished by their severity and concision, and by what Edmund Wilson characterized as their "sharp-edged and flexible style, like the ribbon of a wound-up steel tape-measure." Here is exemplary American prose, and here is the real war—without uplift, without virtue, without purpose. —*BENJAMIN SCHWARZ*

PHANTOMS OF A BLOOD-STAINED PERIOD: THE COMPLETE CIVIL WAR WRITINGS OF AMBROSE BIERCE

edited by Russell Duncan and David J. Klooster

University of Massachusetts Press, 352 pages $19.95

WHO'S WHO IN HELL

by Robert Chalmers

Grove Press, 568 pages, $13.00

What if the obituaries became a vehicle for unapologetic heckling? That's the extended joke at the heart of Robert Chalmers's energetic debut novel chronicling the travails of Daniel Linnell, an obituarist at a prestigious London paper where death notices are packaged as popular entertainment. Daniel's days consist of perusing news articles for "the fatal hint"—anything from an actual illness to "a report that a star had been partying too vigorously." Gravitating toward famous subjects with lurid pasts, he takes a stash of unpublishably nasty obits and begins writing a compendium of the world's depraved, titled *Who's Who in Hell*. Outside the newsroom Daniel falls in love with a thrill-seeking American named Laura, and the two use his book advance to visit her home town of Bedford, Kansas. There they dine nightly with her repressed and disapproving parents and encounter various midwestern eccentrics, whom Daniel shocks with his ghoulish professional tastes.

Chalmers is clearly tickled by the *Who's Who* premise, and spends dozens of pages having Daniel consider the relative merits of including the Marquis de Sade, King Herod, Pol Pot, and Margaret Thatcher. But Daniel's flippant commentaries would need to be devastatingly funny to overcome his morbid subject matter—and they're not. Recently named one of *The Guardian*'s young British novelists to watch, Chalmers has been

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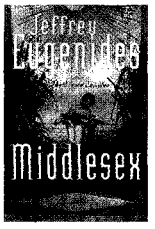
compared to Nick Hornby. Their heroes share some qualities—they're young, English, hip, and male—and the authors share an interest in the comic potential of haplessness, but the similarities end there. Hornby creates fully realized protagonists, whose misadventures achieve a genuine poignancy, whereas Chalmers, even in his less frenetic moments, favors snappy comebacks over characterization. Laura, for instance, functions as a tireless, and ultimately tiresome, purveyor of wisecracks, a brassy raconteur who compares her mother's life to Belarus (both have "a history of eclipse and surrender"). Unfortunately, most of Chalmers's jokes are literary cul-de-sacs, laugh lines leading absolutely nowhere. Daniel's *Who's Who* is unceremoniously ditched in an abrupt half paragraph midway through the story (the book is apparently too libelous to print); by the time Chalmers reinvents his novel as an exploration of marriage, fidelity, and mortality, the reader has chased a few red herrings too many. —*ELIZABETH JUDD*



MIDDLESEX
by Jeffrey Eugenides
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 544 pages
$26.00

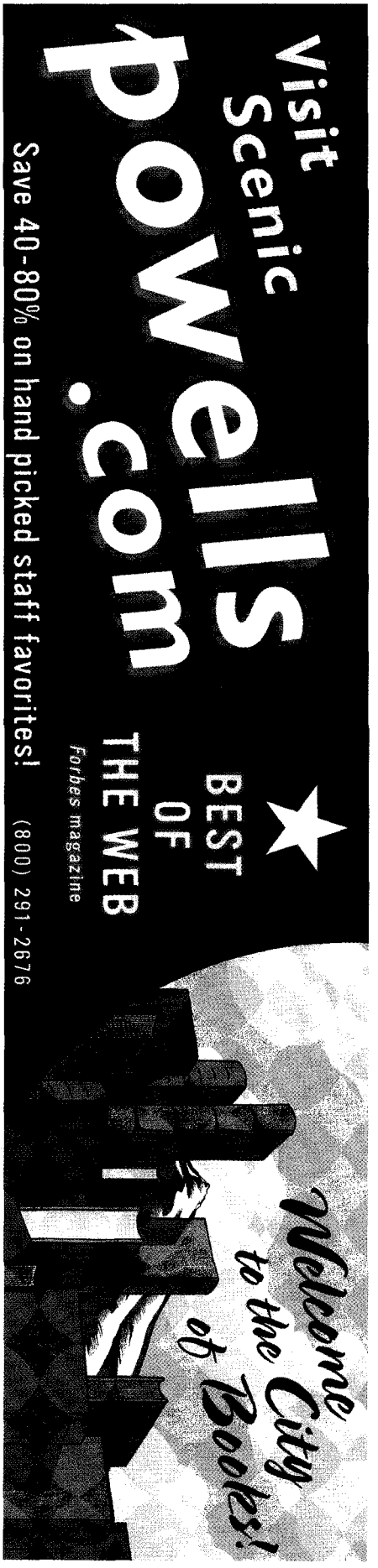
Like its hermaphroditic narrator, Jeffrey Eugenides's long-awaited second novel is a hybrid—it's at once a Greek-American family saga and a picaresque coming-of-age narrative. Whereas the author's first book, *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), was closely woven, *Middlesex* is long and episodic, reaching back across the twentieth century and bringing in dozens of characters. Yet the organization is simple. Calliope Helen Stephanides—now the forty-one-year-old male narrator, Cal—tells us how he came to switch sexual identities; how he kept his secret; and what happens once his true nature is exposed.

Middlesex is consistently whimsical in its scene-setting and use of language, but despite its vaudeville exchanges and niftily isolated punch lines, it's rarely out-and-out funny. The narration is baldly self-conscious in its cleverness. In the beginning Cal refers to his brother as Chapter Eleven, and throughout the first half he interrupts the story to give us portentous glimpses of coming events. Likewise, and also in the manner of the picaresque, the author takes advantage of his loose structure and has the narrator recap in spots what's happened so far, as if, in all the commotion, we might have forgotten.

The reader spends much of the first half of the book anticipating the birth of its hero, yet when Calliope finally arrives, her early childhood flies by, warranting less than a dozen pages (which gloss over the question of why her mother didn't discover her secret while changing or bathing her). At this point, having established a historical sweep across several generations, the book noticeably shifts gears. The final two hundred pages focus on just a couple of years of Calliope's adolescence, giving Eugenides a chance to revisit the world of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, that he sketched so brilliantly in *The Virgin Suicides*.

Perhaps this is the author's true home territory, because it's here, in Calliope's sexual awakening, in the tensions of innocent and helpless desire, that *Middlesex* is at its best. At her private girls' school Calliope falls in love with another student, whom Cal calls The Object, and their teenage romance, with all its Nixon-era trappings, leads—through a series of improbable events—to her unmasking. The tail end of the book, covering her testing at the hands of a pop sexpert, her choice to become Cal, and a brief dip into the underworld of porn, is anticlimactic, though line-by-line the writing is always jaunty and sharp.

The action stops in 1975, with the now male Cal in contemporary Berlin. Throughout the book, in the briefest of vignettes, he's been trying to romance a photographer named Julie while paralyzed by fear of disclosing his true nature; but this is so undeveloped compared with the other sections that the reader never feels it fully. And such problems plague the whole novel: it's off proportionally, both section-to-section and overall, its two halves at odds, each interesting at times but neither truly satisfying, despite Eugenides's prodigious talent. Like Cal, it's damned by its own abundance, not quite sure what it wants to be. —*STEWART O'NAN*



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HOME ALONE

It's all too easy to deride Martha Stewart, but the attacks on her often point up how much there is to admire

BY CAITLIN FLANAGAN

.....

Christopher Byron has had the misfortune of writing a lengthy book on Martha Stewart's business dealings that went to press before news broke of what would surely have been its centerpiece—the Imclone scandal. Nor have the fates been kind to him in the matters of prose style or basic storytelling ability. *Martha Inc.* is a book with rather high literary aspirations, but they go bust from the get-go: in the opening sentences of Chapter One, Stewart's father, Eddie Kostyra, is described as a "self-absorbed narcissist." One of Christopher Byron's desires—and not a bad one—is to give readers a sense of Martha Stewart's true nature. Regrettably, his means for achieving this goal border on the comical, as he marshals all of Western art and culture (and, one senses, the entirety of his Yale undergraduate education) to his aid. In the course of the book Stewart is compared to the Romanovs, Richard Nixon, "the ghostly wife of King Popiel the Heartless," elevator music, the Jim Carrey character in *The Truman Show*, the Karl Malden character in *One-Eyed Jacks*, the Jeff Daniels character in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, a "demonically possessed character out of a horror movie," an unspecified character "out of a Bo Widerberg movie," a central character in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the Cheshire Cat, Dorothy Gale, Jay Gatsby, Marie Antoinette, Macbeth, Evita Peron, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Jr., Walt Disney, a witch, a saint, a participant in Torquemada's Theater of Tortures, the Ohio State football team, the Chicago Bulls, Chairman Mao, and (perhaps most unlikely of all, and for an entire chapter) Nancy Drew. That this curious assemblage is incapable of suggesting any one human being—and least of all Martha Stewart—eludes Byron, although midway through the book we find a defeated little remark that amounts to an authorial waving of the white flag: Stewart, he decides, is really just "like everyone." She has "good qualities and bad qualities, and still other qualities that seemed to occupy a kind of 'work in progress' niche in between." Well, then maybe we ought to let poor old Richard Nixon rest in peace.

Byron makes Stewart appear distasteful, but no one could be more distasteful than Byron himself, as he dredges up news about Stewart's hysterectomy, does his level best to glean facts from her sealed divorce file, and reports on the intimate sleeping arrangements of her teenage daughter. In Byron's hands Stewart can't catch a break. When she and her husband relocated their young family from Manhattan to Turkey Hill Farm, in Westport, Connecticut, "scarcely had the couple moved to the country than they found enough money to dump the child in a fancy country day school a mile from Turkey Hill and left her to fend for herself." It's a remark that prompts the reader to wonder what the preferable alternative was—enrolling the little girl in a public school farther from home and attending classes with her? (He seems also to have forgotten that in the book's preface he explained proudly that he and his glamorous subject "had actually been leading parallel lives"; in fact, Byron and his wife "had sent [their] daughter to the same country day school where the Stewarts had sent theirs.") We get the by now familiar litany of offenses (hopped up with a few spicy new additions) that prove conclusively that Martha Stewart is the rottenest, nastiest person ever to draw breath: she was mean to a trick-or-treater, frightened a Boy Scout, jumped to the head of a line at a tag sale, ran over a kitten, and irritated an employee at a Chinese restaurant so badly that he blurted out, "I don't give a fuck." She honked at slowpokes in a bank drive-through. She unplugged a guest-room mini-fridge in which a visitor had been storing yummy "coffee, juice, leftovers and snacks." She once borrowed a large pot and never returned it. A guest at one of her breakfast meetings was made "instantly nauseous" by the fare. Even Stewart's breathtaking triumphs (such as seizing and maintaining control of a Charlie Rose interview) are portrayed in the same grim light as are her disastrous lapses of judgment (such as actually dating Charlie Rose). Sometimes Byron's tone is that of a censorious eighth-grade girl, as when he reports that "Martha is not a good mixer at parties." Much has been made in the press of the fact that contrary to expectation, *Martha Inc.* is not the nastiest biography of Stewart yet published. But not for lack of trying. Byron wants us to understand that Stewart is an egomaniac (perhaps even a self-absorbed narcissist), and this should not require much heavy lifting on his part. But oftentimes his evidence lacks punch. When a Cuban tour guide tells her that he learned English by tuning in Tom Brokaw's news broadcasts using a homemade antenna, we get this bit of silliness:

> Whether Martha was genuinely interested or irritated that her "guide" was talking about a rival celebrity isn't known. But whatever her feelings at the new direction in the conversation, she nonetheless quickly managed to steer things back toward something that made her the center of events once again. She said, "I can buy you a satellite dish and send it to you."

Stop this monster before she maims and kills!

Byron performs arabesques of conclusion upon the weakest scaffolding of facts. We learn, for example, that the Kostyra family home "had a single full bath, and two washrooms—one in the basement and the other off the kitchen, where Eddie would shave and relieve himself during mealtimes, whether the family liked it or not." The source for this unlovely revelation seems to be one of Stewart's "Remembering" columns (a regular feature of her *Martha Stewart*

MARTHA INC.: THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF MARTHA STEWART LIVING OMNIMEDIA
by Christopher Byron
John Wiley and Sons
406 pages, $27.95

MARTHA STEWART
by Charles J. Shields
Chelsea House
112 pages, $21.95

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Living magazine), in which she remarks of the household facilities, "One of the half-bathrooms was a toilet and a sink off the kitchen—that was really Dad's private domain." How we get from this unremarkable statement to Dad's "reliev[ing] himself during mealtimes" is, I think, what makes so much of this book "The Incredible Story" that it is. Byron is quite rabid on the subject of the "Remembering" columns. In the kind of footnote that makes one think it was really a pity he gave up the law in favor of writing, he tells us, "At the time of this book's writing, ninety-five such columns had been published. Copies of all were obtained and digested for this book." A lesser student of human evil might assume that in ninety-five columns about her childhood, a person might commit a few inconsistencies and repetitions; but Byron is a stickler for absolute accuracy in such matters. Stewart wrote in 1982 that she first visited Europe with her husband, but then wrote in a "Remembering" column that she first went to the Continent with her mother—and Byron cries foul. He is certainly not the first to sense that collectively these columns leave a telling record of their author's interests and intentions, but surely it is the biographer's job—if his method is to involve a careful examination of these things—to make something more of their various obfuscations and revisions than the observation that they all appear to have been "dashed off on the way to the airport."

But the book just comes apart at the seams when it addresses its intended main subject—not the personality of Martha Stewart but, rather, her business acumen and success. Byron, a financial reporter, serves up plenty of blather about "a Harvard B-school concept known as 'synergy'" and the intricacies of television syndication deals and the dot-com revolution. He tells us that Stewart is "the human embodiment of an abstract marketing message," but what, exactly, that message might be is beyond him. I knew that we might be in the hands of someone distinctly unsuited to write about a woman whose financial success is based, in large part, on cooking and fine dining when he described the faces of the girls in her high school yearbook as appearing to be "frozen in aspic." But at every turn he fails to understand what, precisely, Stewart is selling, and to whom and how. For her followers he has at best a kind of pity, finding in them a group of hausfraus completely worn down by the one-two punch of women's liberation and housework, and desperate for a messiah. Stewart's fans, we learn, are women "in fly-over America," women who "toiled in Norman Rockwell's silent rituals of life and death and yearned for something more." They are women "who came home exhausted from jobs they didn't really want, to confront equally exhausted husbands and resentful latchkey children," women severely disillusioned by the fact that the women's movement has "morphed into an array of more than 500 increasingly shrill special interest groups, with a thousand different issues and arenas for action"—this disillusionment somehow causing them to run willy-nilly toward Stewart's world of gracious living and entertaining. At worst Byron has contempt for Stewart's fans, especially those who are Kmart shoppers, whom he characterizes as broke, tasteless, rural, and harried. That the chain's executives seem also to have underestimated its customers is clear, although Stewart (perpetually blasted as elitist) never has—which is perhaps why the retailer is in Chapter 11 while Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia is thriving.

Most of the pictures evoke the profound and enduring female desires for solitude and silence. No heterosexual man can understand this stuff, and no woman with an ounce of femininity can resist it.

Over and over, Byron presents scenes in which Stewart doesn't "get" Kmart shoppers; "She didn't really understand what was appropriate merchandise for Kmart ... and what was not," says a former Kmart consultant, to which Byron adds, "Martha had become like the single out-of-step soldier in the army—yet week after week, month after month, she kept pushing to get the whole army to shift to her cadence." He reports that what Kmart wanted from Stewart was merely a little of her allure, a few of her "daffodil daydreams." What she gave the retailer—and what any more competent outfit ought to have been able to turn into a gold mine—was a line of products called Martha Stewart Everyday, which was founded on a simple principle: not that Betty Friedan has left all of womankind hungering for pastels but, rather, that cheap things don't have to be ugly. For dime-store prices she came up with some attractive merchandise, decorated with a restraint not often seen in discount items, that women (and, in not insignificant numbers, gay men) loved buying. Shortly after Kmart announced its financial woes, the *New York Observer* ran a Simon Doonan column titled "Domestic Slaves of New York Confess Dependency on Kmartha," in which he reported panic buying of Martha Stewart Everyday ware and said that "these middle-class groovers are not slumming for a hit of reverse chic: They are sincerely appreciative of the amazing value and quality that Martha offers." Typical of the line is a very pretty white eyelet shower curtain with a scalloped hem, a product with which I am intimately familiar, because it is hanging in my bathroom. And typical of Byron's inability to understand these products or their appeal is his characterization of Stewart as a control freak "who turned up at every meeting, determined to elbow and nudge her way into every decision made in her name ... all the way down to demanding to know the thread-count per square inch in sheets and towels sold under her name." It's a foolish remark, because, of course, the only really important thing about sheets is their thread count. He later notes snidely that reporters at a publicity event for Stewart's linens thought the patterns were lovely but "once [they] touched the sheets they were reminded where they came from," because "they

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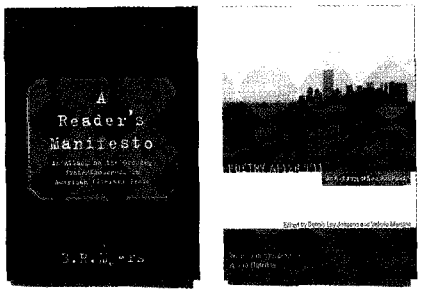
weren't as soft as [Ralph] Lauren's or Calvin Klein's." Why? Because the thread count was too low, you idiot.

Martha Inc. is so bloated, repetitive, and overwrought that the reader is much more often frustrated by Byron's meanderings and hypotheses than enlightened by his perceptions. Happily, another recent biography tackles the subject of Stewart's business success with clarity and precision: the Martha Stewart volume in the Women of Achievement series, which you can find in the young-adult section of your local public library. (Stewart is apparently someone whom educational publishers think schoolchildren ought to know about; there are also Martha Stewart volumes in the People to Know and the Library of Famous Women series.) Skip the introductory essay on women's history that is printed in each volume (written by Matina S. Horner, the president emerita of Radcliffe College, it evokes Abigail Adams and Ralph Waldo Emerson, two thinkers who may be fine guardians of the volumes on Eleanor Roosevelt and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but who may strike too resounding a gong for Women of Achievement such as Cher, Gloria Estefan, and Barbara Walters).

Charles J. Shields, the author of the Stewart volume, trots us through the high points of Stewart's early life and career in short order, making astute observations as to how these various experiences may have shaped her as a businesswoman. Compared with Byron's fervid ramblings, this clear analysis is a welcome relief. In his attempt to provide a brief, vivid sketch of Stewart's domineering father, Byron puts his shoulder to the wheel: Eddie Kostyra was a Captain Queeg, a Stanley Kowalski, a "nobly born" character from an Hilaire Belloc rhyme, both faces of Janus. It's a bravura display of the Byron technique, but it can't compare with Shields's fascinating revelation that Eddie Kostyra's mother "had taught him how to cook, sew, and garden, in the hope of encouraging his creative side," and that Eddie decorated the high school gym for the prom during Martha's junior year. Of her early modeling career Byron says that Stewart lacked the "erotic and sexually charged" quality of the sixties model Veruschka and failed to capture the attention of Richard Avedon as had Twiggy. Why he sees a need to compare Stewart's modeling work (conducted part-time while she was a student in high school and college) with that of two of the most famous fashion models of the era is unclear, although he misses an obvious point that Shields does not: "Working with photographers gave her a sense of how things should look, or be presented." Byron on Stewart's work as a stockbroker: "What was Martha's job? The same job any good-looking young woman got in the 1960s in a world dominated by men: Walk into the room, sit down, and cross her legs." Shields on the same topic: "She was learning the ropes of big business and its key elements—investment, negotiation, and finance." (Whether she was also learning the rudiments of insider trading has turned out to be one of the most gleefully debated questions of the summer. To borrow a page from the Byron style book, not since Marie Antoinette got hauled off to the Conciergerie—or Leona Helmsley to federal prison—has there been the potential of such a thrilling new addition to the female prison population.) Shields gives us Stewart's own take on her Kmart experiences, which brings the conflict between her and the retailer into much sharper focus than any of Byron's hyperbole: "When I first started with Kmart, I was very enthusiastic to build a fine business with them. Little did I know that management was extremely weak and their inventory control and computer programs a complete disaster."

What no biography of Stewart has yet accomplished is an insightful analysis of the core questions that her phenomenal success prompts. Many writers—especially male writers, such as Byron and Jerry Oppenheimer, the author of *Martha Stewart: Just Desserts* (1997)—have been fascinated by her famously mercurial temperament and the unsavory details of her personal life. But other than indulging in juicy speculation (such as Oppenheimer's creepy fascination with Stewart's heavy menstrual periods and Byron's notion that she had a hysterectomy as a form of birth control,



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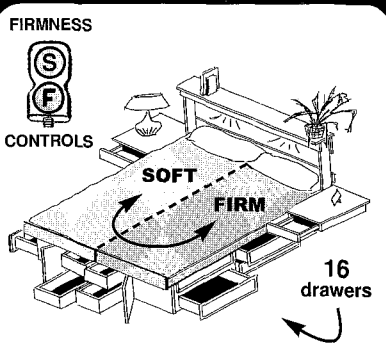

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a notion that only a man could believe and only a jerk could promulgate), they don't know what to do with these supposed secrets except to humiliate Stewart by making them public. The notion of an attractive late-midlife woman who offers homemaking advice on television but leads an off-camera life marked by nastiness and single-girl liberty is rife with comedic possibility (it is the basis for the Sue Ann Nivens character on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*), and this type draws the cruelest of the biographers. But these writers' books fail because they assume that Stewart's success is based on the stupidity of women, their inability to see through her many inconsistencies and hypocrisies. If only those dumb clucks would read the "Remembering" columns more critically! They'd cancel their subscriptions in an instant! Byron misses nothing less than the heart of Stewart's appeal to women.

In the first place there is the incontrovertible fact of her tremendous style. The photography in her various publications seems to reduce all of female longing to its essential elements. A basket of flowers, a child's lawn pinafore draped across a painted rocking chair, an exceptionally white towel folded in thirds and perched in glamorous isolation on a clean and barren shelf: most of the pictures feature a lot of sunlight, and many show rooms that are either empty of people or occupied solely by Martha, evoking the profound and enduring female desires for solitude and silence. No heterosexual man can understand this stuff, and no woman with a beating heart and an ounce of femininity can resist it. I can unpack a paragraph of Martha Stewart prose with the best of them, but I also fall mute and wondering at the pages of *Martha Stewart Living*.

Stewart's aesthetic has been steadily evolving over the past two decades, and at this point it has reached a peak of almost unbearable perfection. To compare her two wedding volumes—published in 1987 and 1999—is to see just how far things have come. The first appeared at the precise moment when Americans by the millions were returning to formal weddings; in fact, its publication was so timely and so influential that it's hard to know to what extent Stewart predicted the craze and to what extent she created it. The book has a documentary quality: it features photographs of actual weddings she catered during the summers of 1984 and 1985 and also some that she heard about and asked if she might photograph and include in the book. The pictures are full of the mess and indignity of real life. There are a few unattractive brides and a couple of chubby ones (as well as several couples of such heartrending youth and hopefulness that I banished a vague notion of doing a longitudinal study of the fate of these marriages as soon as it flitted through my head). There are wedding guests in shorts and shirtsleeves, several preparing to board a Greyhound bus, a couple of Porta Potties nestled into a leafy corner of a reception site. On one table there's a two-liter bottle of Coca-Cola, on another a fifth of cheap Scotch. But to look at the more recent volume is to see all this unpleasantness burnished away. Actual brides are for the most part relegated to small black-and-white photographs; the full-color spreads feature models and careful art direction and receptions unsullied by actual guests. The venues for these stage-set weddings seem to be a collection of New England chapels of the highest caliber. Whitewashed shingles and gleaming wooden pews provide austere backdrops for garlands of flowers, wreaths of flowers, paper cones of flowers; espaliered bushes are covered in clouds of white tulle and tied with silk ribbons; walkways are blanketed in thick drifts of petals; oak trees are hung with white Japanese lanterns. Flower girls wear wreaths of roses and carry more of them; winter weddings feature severe Christmas trees and tall centerpieces of sugared fruit. My attraction to these images has nothing to do with "Norman Rockwell's silent rituals of life and death," nor is it compromised by my knowledge of Stewart's complex personal life. It is rooted in a truth far less mysterious: women like pretty things. Stewart's magazines (she has four titles: *Living*, *Baby*, *Kids*, and *Weddings*) all seem to depict some parallel universe in which loveliness and order are untrammeled by the surging chaos of life in session, particularly life as it is lived with

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small children. In an issue of *Martha Stewart Kids*, I recently saw a photograph of a pair of old-fashioned white baby shoes with their laces replaced by two lengths of grosgrain ribbon. The result was impractical in the extreme, and very, very pretty. Which is a fair summation of many Stewart projects. In one of his few apt observations, Christopher Byron calls Stewart's "the face of the age." I would also say that the look of her magazines has become the look of women's magazines of the age: the photography, art direction, and layouts in many contemporary publications—including the recent magazine *Real Simple*, the redesigned *Child*, and all the craft and decorating features in *Rosie* (the revamped *McCall's*)—are clearly and deeply influenced by Stewart's.

Much of the Stewart enterprise, of course, involves a certain level of fantasy and wish fulfillment, having to do not only with the old dreams of wealth and elegance but also with the new one of time. That many of Stewart's projects are time-consuming is in fact part of their appeal. A risibly complicated recipe for sandwiches that are a "tempting snack for a 1-year-old," which ran in a recent issue of *Baby* (flower-shaped, their bright-yellow centers were created by mashing cooked egg yolk with butter, rolling the resulting paste into a tube, wrapping the tube in parchment paper, refrigerating it, and then slicing it into half-inch-thick rounds), is attractive not in spite of its ludicrous complexity but because of it—*imagine having enough time to do something like that!* The question of whether Stewart is indeed the "teacher" she has always professed to be or whether she is a kind of performance artist is an old one; I think that a significant number of women—including some of Stewart's staunchest defenders—appreciate what she does but never personally attempt it. *Martha Stewart Living* is filled with recipes for complicated restaurant-type food—caramelized fennel, warm goat cheese with wasabi-pea crust, and the like—but the ads are for Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad, and Hormel's pre-cooked roast beef, and Jell-O. One gets the sense that women enjoy reading about the best way to select a leg of lamb, but when it's dinner-

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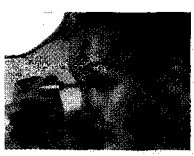

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Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* and all Marcan context, and upon this develops a narrative about Jesus that is tenably historical.

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time, they give an exhausted shrug and settle for the ease and convenience of Campbell's 2-Step Beefy Taco Joes, the recipe for which appears in a Campbell's ad in the magazine's recent hundredth issue.

The true engine of her success has much to do with a remark Stewart makes in Chapter One of her first book, the phenomenally successful *Entertaining* (1982).

> Entertaining provides a good excuse to put things in order (polish silver, wash forgotten dishes, wax floors, paint a flaking windowsill) and, sometimes, to be more fanciful or dramatic with details than usual. It is the moment to indulge in a whole bank of flowering plants to line the hall, or to organize a collection of antique clothes on a conspicuous coat-rack, or to try the dining-room table at an odd angle.

The second sentence, of course, is the stuff of a thousand jokes and parodies—not just a vase of flowers but a "bank" of them; the elaborate clothing display that no normal householder has the resources or the willingness to pull off. But the first sentence is the one to keep your eye on, with its unremarkable but attractive suggestion of a house put in order: a windowsill painted, floors gleaming under a new coat of wax. In the hundredth issue of *Martha Stewart Living*, Stewart says that she recently came across a memo she wrote at the magazine's inception, one that she feels expresses her vision as clearly today as it did then. "Our reader," the memo states, "still wants to iron, to polish silver, to set a sensible table, to cook good food." She's right, of course; millions of women still "want" to do these things, although an astonishing number of them (myself included) don't do much ironing or polishing anymore, and are repeatedly frustrated by the nightly return to the kitchen. Our desire to reconnect with these tasks—which we fear are crucial to a well-run home—is commensurate with our uncertainty about what, exactly, they entail. Just as Disneyland presents a vision of Main Street, USA, that is very far afield from the real thing, so Stewart presents a vision of domesticity that involves as much make-believe as practicality, that is filled with allure and prettiness rather than the drudgery and exhaustion of which we are all so wary. She lectures not on the humdrum reality of sweeping the kitchen floor every night but on the correct way to store two dozen specialty brooms. Not on washing the dishes meal after relentless meal but on the advisability of transferring dishwashing liquid from its unattractive plastic bottle to a cut-glass cruet with a silver stopper. The Stewart fantasy encompasses the feminine interest in formal weddings and gracious entertaining, but principally—and more powerfully—it turns on a wistful and almost shameful attraction to ironing boards and newly washed crockery and good meals sensibly prepared. And on this wan longing, Stewart has built an empire.

None of which is to suggest that I have any fondness for Stewart, whom I find the most unpleasant person on television. She is stern and exacting about things for which I have only the fondest and gentlest associations: flower beds and freshly laundered clothes and home-cooked food. That millions of people are happy to be lectured on "family" and "tradition" by a woman whose own marriage imploded and whose relations with her only child have been famously stormy used to drive me wild with frustration; but lately I've softened on the old girl. She is the producer of a myth about American family life that is as old as Hollywood—and if we expected the men who make our best-loved "family movies" to comport themselves honorably as husbands and fathers, we'd be sunk at matinee time. Her faltering confessions about her private domestic bewilderments (she should have "read more psychology books," she has said about her early career as a mother; it was "a big mistake" to have had an only child) provide her most humanizing moments. And I find something touching and almost elegiac in her memories of the family that raised her, for all the ridicule they receive: "We all sat down to dinner at the same time, and we all got up at the same time and we were very close-knit."

Clearly, something powerful is at work here, some weaving together of the dream of a "close knit" family with rigid adherence to complicated baking and gardening protocols. There was a

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time when the measure of a home was found in the woman who ran it—who was there all day long, who understood that certain aspects of "hominess" had less to do with spit and polish than with continuity and permanence. As these old standards wane, a new one has emerged, and it is Stewart's. No human effort is so fundamentally simple and pleasurable that she cannot render it difficult and off-putting (we are to be grateful that thus far she has not produced a marriage manual). But almost any project she cooks up is less daunting than the one it is meant to replace: keeping a family together, under one roof, home.

Caitlin Flanagan is a contributing editor of The Atlantic.

BOOKS

LOSS AND ENDURANCE

Rohinton Mistry's tragic and triumphant vision

BY BROOKE ALLEN

.....

Rohinton Mistry is not a household name, but it should be. The fifty-year-old Toronto resident, originally from Bombay, has long been recognized as one of the best Indian writers; he ought to be considered simply one of the best writers, Indian or otherwise, now alive.

Mistry is not prolific, but his development has been swift and steady. His first book, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories From Firozsha Baag* (1987), was a wryly humorous series of interlocking tales rather in the manner of his countryman R. K. Narayan, or at least identifiable as part of the same gentle fictional tradition. His second, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), remained anchored in the world of his earlier stories, that of petit bourgeois Parsi families who struggle, sometimes desperately, to hold on to precarious livelihoods and dwindling status in decaying Bombay apartment blocks, and who dream of emigrating to Canada—"not just the land of milk and honey," as one of Mistry's characters, fed up with Bombay's foul aromas, puts it, but "also the land of deodorant and toiletry."

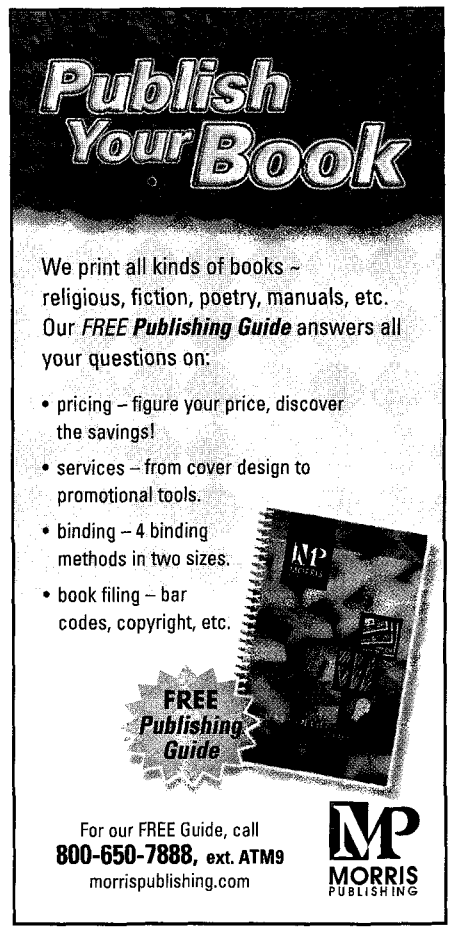
THE EDITOR'S CHOICE

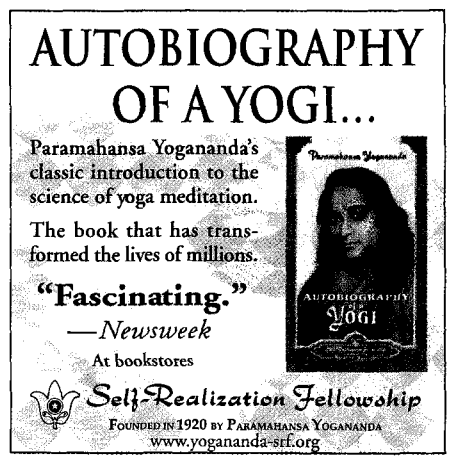
FAMILY MATTERS
by Rohinton Mistry
Knopf, 439 pages, $26.00

Swimming Lessons and *Such a Long Journey* were the work of a miniaturist, tightly contained within one claustrophobic community. Coming on the heels of these two lovely but essentially regional books, *A Fine Balance* (1995) was a surprise: panoramic, intensely dramatic, bursting out of the bounds Mistry had previously set for himself. It earned comparisons with the work of Dickens and Tolstoy. This high praise is not exaggerated.

The Literary Review, with some justice, called *A Fine Balance* "*the* India novel, the novel readers have been waiting for since E. M. Forster." The book is set in 1975. Forster's India, the Raj of King George V, where Britons and Indians hovered awkwardly on either side of an unbridgeable gap, has given way to the "Goonda Raj" of Indira Gandhi, where Hindus are separated from Muslims, and Parsis from Sikhs, and the immemorial laws of caste facilitate the brutal exploitation of the helpless by the powerful as the corrupt government leads the way.

A lot of nonsense has been written by literary critics, and others, about "the human spirit," tempting one to point out that the human spirit has always been remarkable more for greed and rapacity than for the exalted qualities the term usually celebrates. Yet occasionally a book rekindles our affection for the human race, and *A Fine Balance* is one. Although the suffering within it should be unbearable to observe, the reading experience is in fact strangely joyful. We can only reflect, with the author, that "where humans were concerned, the only emotion that made sense was wonder, at their ability to endure," and notice that those of Mistry's characters who retain this ability are those who have also





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retained their sense of humor. Mistry has a keenly developed feeling for the absurd: there is hardly a page in all of his fiction that isn't funny on one level or another. What makes the final pages of *A Fine Balance* heartbreaking is not that we see the protagonists' lives so hideously diminished but that in spite of it all they are still laughing.

Family Matters, Mistry's new novel, charts the effects of religious bigotry and rigid traditionalism as they work their insidious way through generations of a family. In the prime of his life Nariman Vakeel was compelled by his parents and their orthodox Parsi circle to give up the woman he loved, a non-Parsi Goan, and marry the more appropriate Yasmin, a widow with two children, Jal and Coomy. "No happiness is more lasting than the happiness that you get from fulfilling your parents' wishes," a family friend tells him, and he allows himself to believe this lie. His subsequent loveless marriage blights the family for decades.

The distortion of the religious impulse into an instrument of prejudice and exclusion propels the novel and its characters; indeed, everywhere in Mistry's work a retreat into ritual indicates spiritual impoverishment. In *Family Matters*, Parsi fundamentalism wrecks the family's harmony and pollutes the very air at Nariman's flat in the ironically misnamed Chateau Felicity apartment building, while beyond Chateau Felicity, Hindu fundamentalism, in the form of Shiv Sena thugs, wantonly ruins the lives of thousands. The thoughtful Nariman is especially wary of the threat posed by zealotry: he admonishes Coomy, for example, for referring to acts of God, observing that she "was getting into the bad habit of burdening God with altogether too much responsibility: 'And that is good for neither God nor us.'"

One of the strongest features of Mistry's novels—and the reason he is so reminiscent of the great nineteenth-century writers—is his use, sometimes audacious, of big metaphors. *Family Matters* and *A Fine Balance* are masterly in the way they imbue certain lives, or deaths, with meaning. Nariman's wife and his lover, for instance, are perversely joined in death as they were, much against their wills, during their lives. One of Mistry's most memorable characters is the powerful Beggarmaster in *A Fine Balance*, a terrifying fusion of cruelty and compassion. Beggarmaster literally buys beggars, often children; sends them to doctors for "professional modifications" (limbs amputated, eyes put out); and sets them up on street corners, then claiming a cut of their take. A figure of nightmare, in fact; yet he cares for his beggars with the utmost vigilance, and functions as an honorable protector and insurer in an anarchic world where the police have become more threat than protector. Beggarmaster's star beggar is Shankar, a legless, fingerless man who propels himself around on a rolling platform. In a plot twist that only Mistry—or Dickens—could have come up with, Beggarmaster and Shankar turn out to be half brothers. The revelation of this fact, and the striking, even emblematic, manner of the two men's deaths, are unforgettable.

Major writers differ from minor ones, even great minor ones, in their ability to handle the big questions: death, family, the passing of time, the inevitability of loss, God or the corresponding God-shaped hole. Mistry handles all of them in an accomplished style entirely his own. He also manages, with gentle insistence, to focus our attention on what we have and what we are constantly in the process of losing. Children leave; families disintegrate; love slips away; moments of happiness, too often unrecognized at the time, vanish into the past. Material well-being is fragile: as Beggarmaster pointedly remarks, "People forget how vulnerable they are despite their shirts and shoes and briefcases, how this hungry and cruel world could strip them, put them in the same position as my beggars." Immaterial possessions are just as evanescent; memory itself fragments and fades. "Losing, and losing again," one of Mistry's characters insists, "is the very basis of the life process, till all we are left with is the bare essence of human existence." Mistry's work illustrates the comment only too effectively; and yet this essence, seen through his eyes, is still beautiful.

Brooke Allen is a frequent contributor to The Atlantic.

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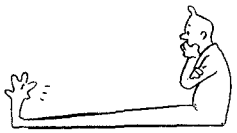


THE PUZZLER

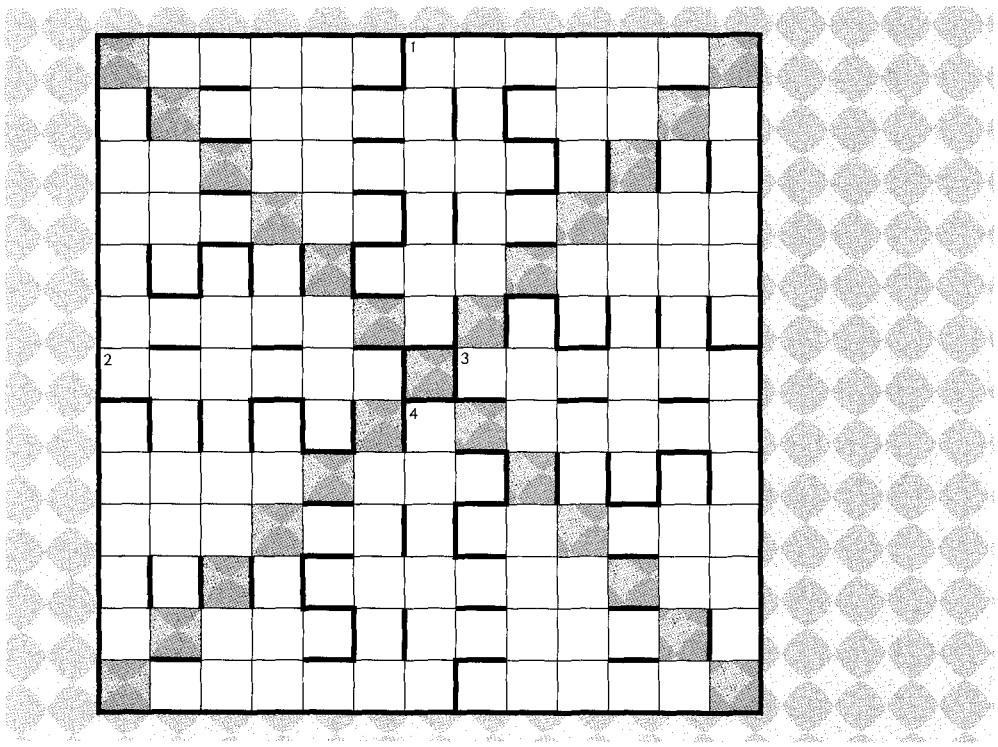
by EMILY COX *and* HENRY RATHVON

Sign of the Times

A different letter of the alphabet belongs in each of the 24 shaded squares crossed by puzzle entries. The remaining two letters of the alphabet are reserved, aptly, for the 25th shaded square, at the center of the grid; when placed there in the proper order they will form a timely symbol. The four entries not intersecting any shaded squares are clued in the order of their given locations; all other entries are clued in mixed order. Clue answers include three proper nouns.

Twenty-five years ago this month the first Atlantic *Puzzler was published in these pages. Since then Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon have crafted a puzzle for every issue. They also make puzzles for* The Boston Globe, The New York Times, Attaché, *and the* National Post *of Canada.*

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 155.



ACROSS

2. Portion containing puzzle's primary junction (6)
3. Pitches a fastball at the back of the ankle (6)

DOWN

1. Set of steps going around full curb (6)
4. Cover of darkness or lightness? (6)

MIXED

a. Piece of code cracked by right sort (5)
b. Noble sights on Broadway for the audience (8)
c. Monk absorbed by buzzer in Michigan city (9)
d. Decade for men's formal wear (7)
e. Described cap worn by foreign men (6)
f. Stays in rough sector (6)
g. Members of a Canadian tribe eating first of peach pancakes (6)
h. Sly looks taking in a Democrat's bosses (7)
i. The guy filled with cheer, privy to ace (4,2,3)
j. One who tilts after starting removal (6)
k. Nine catching cold, each part of a mountaineering outfit (3,2)
l. Giant white rabbit? (7)
m. Networks' confusion about helium (6)
n. Okay, stuff dug up behind foe's back is not a pretty sight (7)
o. Bar what's found in a heel (8)
p. Oswald mangled maxim (3,3)
q. Matched anger, breaking tablet (6)
r. A sect is disturbed about 100 hermits (8)
s. Part of staff is called regarding money matters (6)
t. *Veggie Lover*'s inaugural article about how Lincoln introduced himself? (4,4)
u. Fiddle music initially interrupting recorder (6)
v. In hearing, is allowed to measure composition (6)
w. Server's situation unsatisfactory in one period (2,3)
x. Turning down J. R., get nice convertible (9)
y. Art supplies some beers around one (6)
z. Innocent, assuming positive intention (7)
aa. Opening of dam gathers waterfowl (6)
bb. Keeping quiet, balance large knife (7)
cc. Pioneering astronaut missing premiere on one of the Fab Four (6)
dd. Located around university proper (6)
ee. Destroyer must ultimately like Atahualpa (3,3)
ff. Is seen again in Spanish for antecedent (9)
gg. Bad atmosphere for Maureen O'Sullivan? (6)
hh. Physicist's room surrounded with iron and iodine (5)
ii. Vague period just before taking credit card back (7)
jj. Setting next novel in bed (7)

Note: *The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.*

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Word Court

by Barbara Wallraff

Carola Naumer, of Reno, Nev., writes, "I am being driven crazy by the ubiquitous use of the term *artwork*. I first encountered this term in the seventies, in the context of 'camera-ready artwork' for a party invitation. Now the *Mona Lisa* is *artwork*, the Sistine Chapel ceiling is *artwork*, and both are treated linguistically as though they are on the same level artistically as my invitation. What is wrong with the word *art*, and why is *artwork* replacing it?"

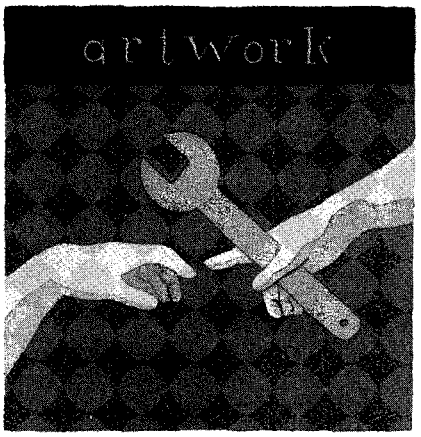
You're right that more and more often one sees citations like this one, from an article that appeared in *USA Today* in June about the former Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski: "... $13 million of old masters and impressionist *artwork*." You're right, too, that *artwork* in its traditional, standard meaning is a good deal less high-toned than *art* can be. It's either a printing term, as you note, or descriptive of "artistic" things "produced in quantity," according to a definition in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*.

Because English-speakers tend not to like using three words where one will do, the extended sense has come about (or so I suspect) owing to the likes of this: "The *Mona Lisa* is among Western civilization's most familiar ..." Tradition calls for the thought to be completed with *works of art*, but some people would naturally assume that *artworks* is an equivalent term. It isn't, quite. And certainly where *art* by itself passes muster (as it would have in the *USA Today* citation), it is preferable.

Carl Linhart, of Sault Sainte Marie, Mich., writes, "I have been searching for years for a learned opinion regarding the correctness of not using an apostrophe with the pronoun *ours*. Various high school English teachers have provided varying answers to this query. Please reply with some advice."

Egad! The next thing you know, English teachers will start having varying opinions about the correctness of the spellings *your's*, *her's*, *hi's*, and *their's*. Possessive pronouns don't use apostrophes: *ours* is correct, along with *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, and *theirs*. The possessive case of nouns does use them: *our friend's* is correct, along with *my friend's* and *your friend's*.

Everyone would already know this, you'd think, if only the study of grammar were taken more seriously. For years, though, I have been hearing anecdotal laments that "they don't teach grammar



in the schools anymore." Recently David M. Bloome, the president-elect of the National Council of Teachers of English, told me that grammar does receive less class time than it used to and explained why: a great deal of research has shown that most schoolchildren who are taught grammar neither remember what they've learned nor become better writers than children who aren't taught grammar. Or, to borrow an analogy from Samuel Jay Keyser, a professor emeritus of linguistics at MIT, who used it to make much the same point to me, "If I wanted to teach kids to swim, I wouldn't give them a course in hydrodynamics; I'd put them in the pool and have them practice swimming."

All the same, if I wanted to be the most effective possible swimming coach, I might find it helpful to know something about hydrodynamics. Bloome and Keyser go along with that. Keyser told me, "The grammar of *ours* is actually fascinating. Although *ours* and *our friend's* are parallel in your examples, note that you can say *our friend's book* but not *ours book*. An English teacher who is interested in things like this will be a better teacher than one who isn't."

Yona Baumel, of Jerusalem, Israel, writes, "You would think that with all the problems we have in Israel, my wife and I would have something more important to disagree about than punctuation. She claims that proper usage calls for a period to come outside the quotation marks at the end of a sentence. I claim that British usage is different from American. Please save our marriage."

Punctuation conventions do indeed differ in British English and American English. British usage calls for periods, and also commas, to appear inside quotation marks when they are part of the matter quoted, but otherwise not. American usage calls for those two marks to appear inside quotation marks in all contexts, for colons and semicolons to appear outside them in pretty much all contexts, and for the placement of question marks and exclamation points to depend on meaning. In Israel today American influence predominates over British, not least because the population includes many thousands of American immigrants and their descendants. So Israeli English increasingly follows U.S. conventions of punctuation.

Do you have a language question or dispute? Write to Word Court in care of The Atlantic Monthly, *77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send e-mail to msgrammar@theatlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court. Ms. Grammar is also on the Web, at www.theatlantic.com/courtrecord.*

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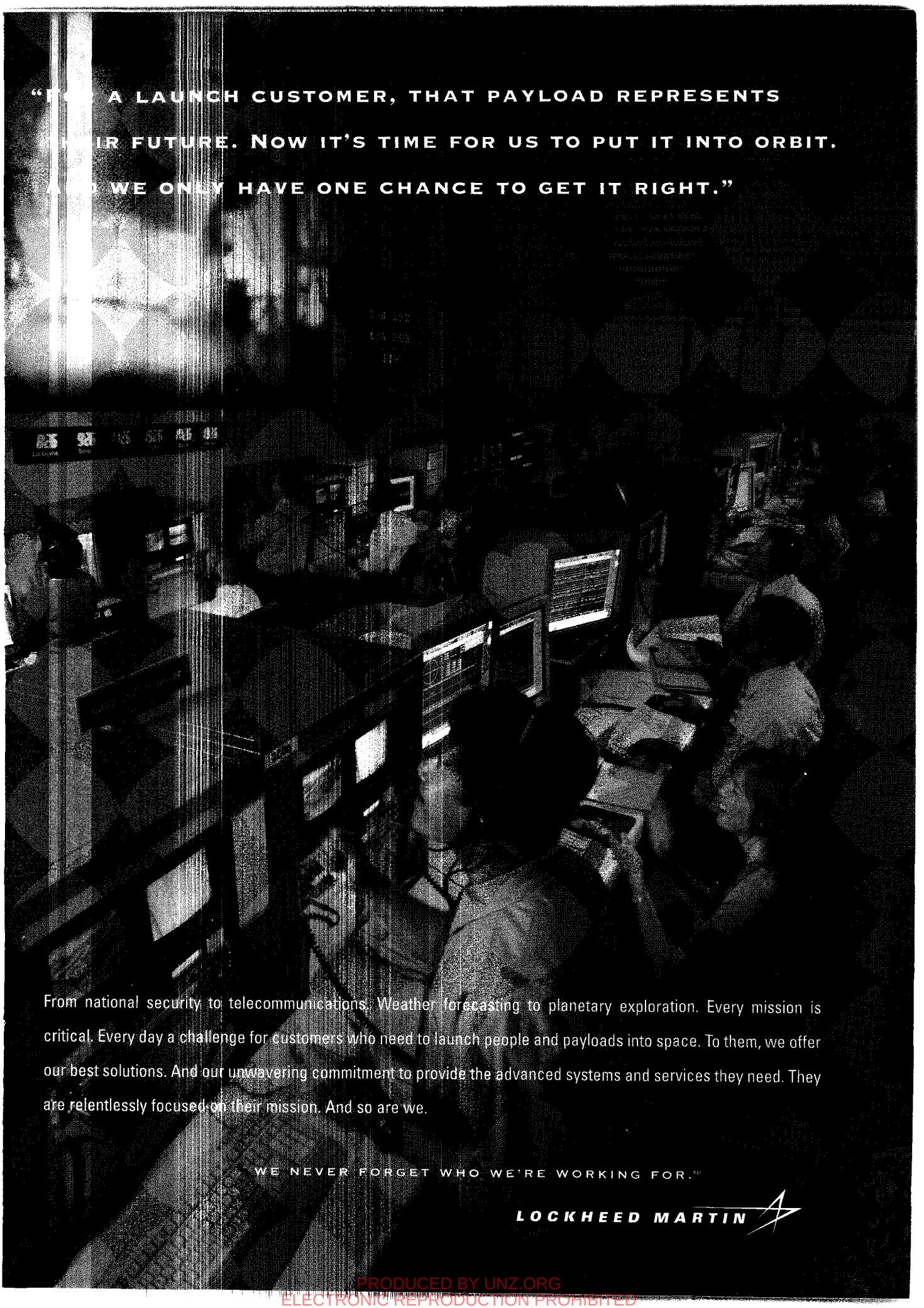

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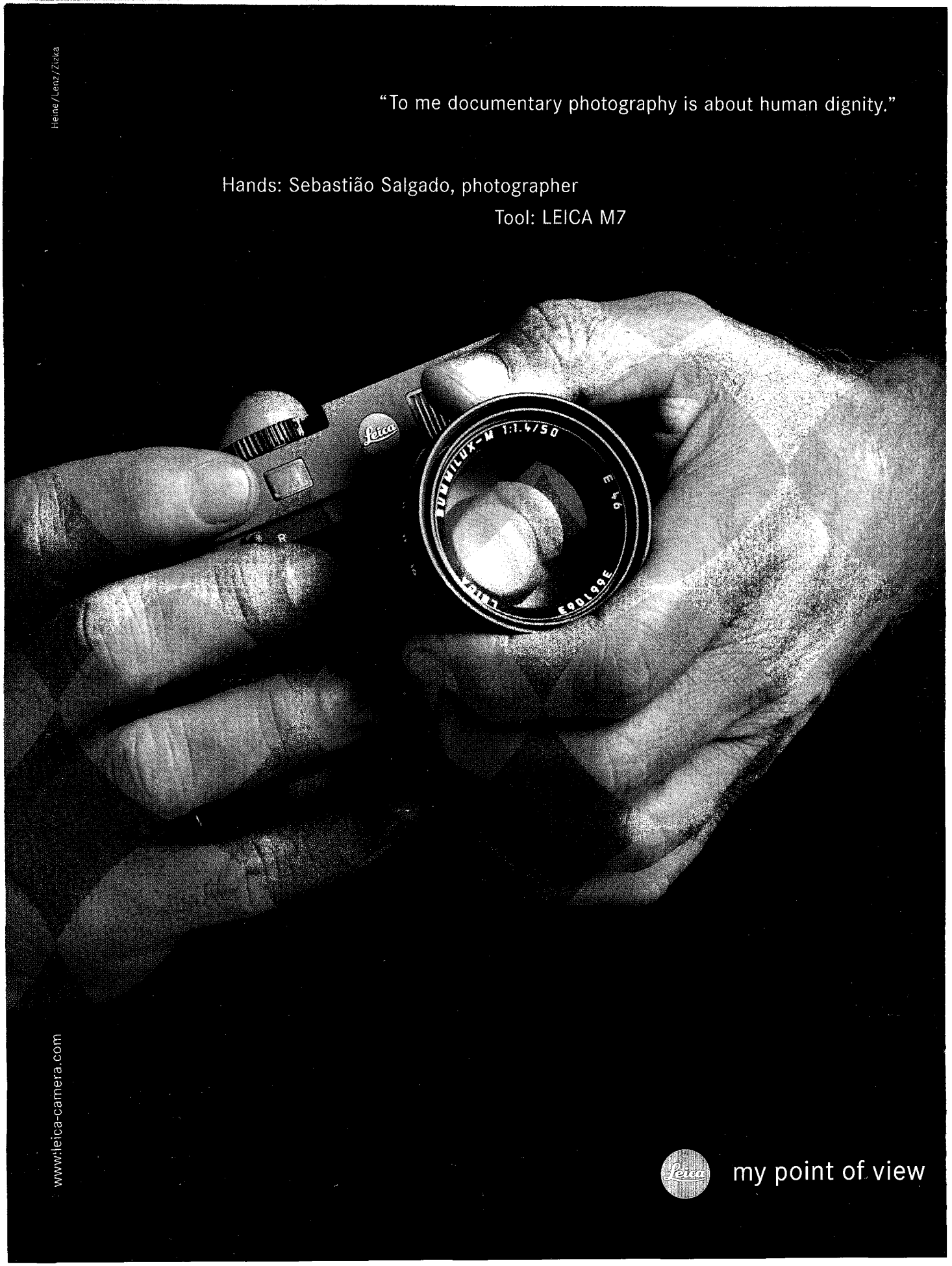

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